Healing with Form, Energy, and Light



The Five Elements in Tibetan Shamanism, Tantra, and Dzogchen

Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche

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by
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Snow Lion Publications
Ithaca, NY / Boulder, CO

Snow Lion Publications
605 West State Street
P.O. Box 6483
Ithaca, NY 14851
607-273-8519
www.snowlionpub.com

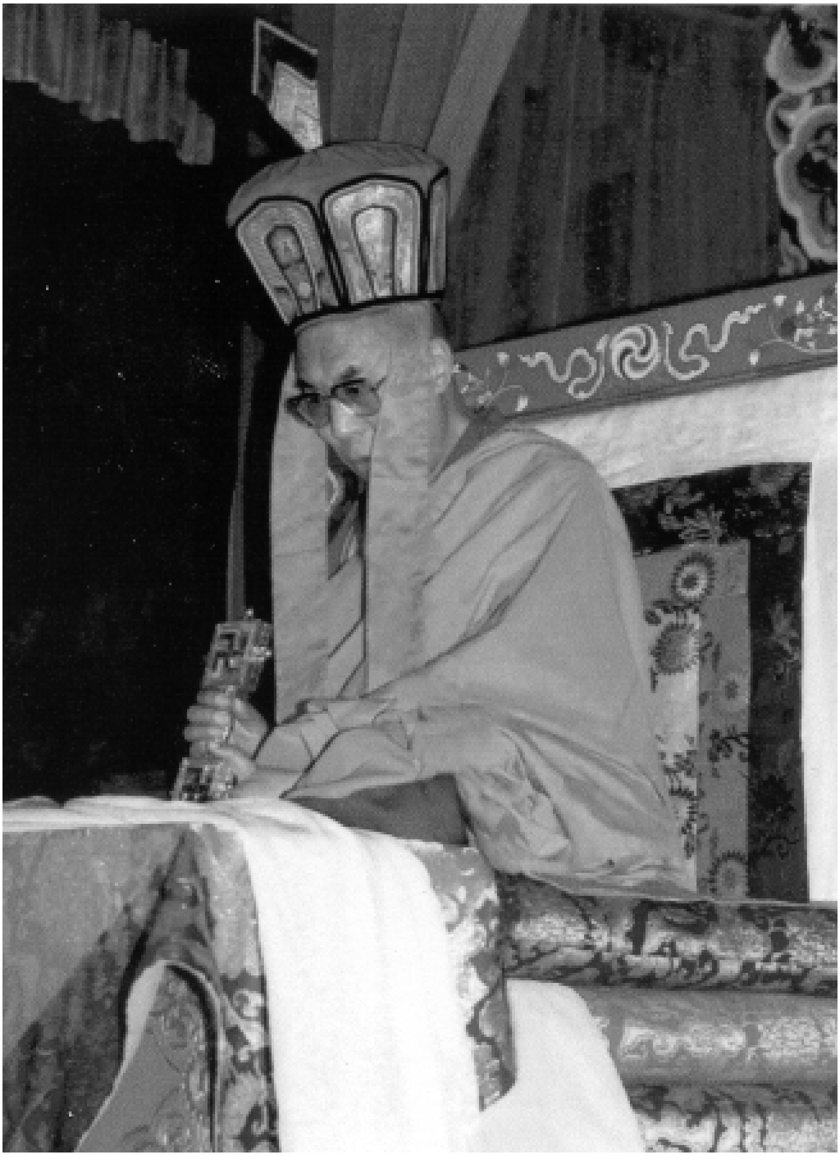
ISBN 1-55939-176-6

Printed in Canada on acid-free recycled paper.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Wangyal, Tenzin.
Healing with form, energy and light : the five elements in Tibetan Shamanism, Tantra, and Dzogchen / Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN 1-55939-176-6
1. Rdzogs-chen (Bonpo). 2. Spiritual life—Bonpo (Sect) 3. Spiritual life—Tantric Buddhism 4. Bonpo (Sect)—Doctrines. I. Title.
BQ7982.3. .W345 2002
299'.54—dc21 2002000288

CONTENTS



H.H. the Dalai Lama at Menri Bönpo Monastery in India

This book is dedicated to:

H. H. The Dalai Lama

H.H. Lungtok Tenpa’i Nyima Rinpoche

Yongzin Tenzin Namdak Rinpoche

and all the teachers from whom I have learned

PREFACE

For the last fifteen years I have been interested in understanding the five elements because such an understanding is important in so many levels of the Bön tradition. During this time I have researched the five elements and have maintained a close relationship to the elemental goddesses through practice. When I had questions about the elements or about practices with the elements, I prayed to the elemental goddesses. In dreams I received their teachings and their blessings.These and other experiences motivated me to write this book

Although all the teachings in the book are based on ancient texts, there is also much in the manner of conveying the teachings that is rooted in my own understanding and experience. Not wanting to write anything that contradicted the teachings, I checked many of the points with my teacher, Lopon Tenzin Namdak Rinpoche, and with other learned Geshes in Nepal and India when I was there in 2000. I am grateful for their guidance. Their enthusiasm and joy about the book and the encouragement they gave me was a great support. Though I followed their direction, any remaining errors or confusions are entirely mine.

For some years I have been teaching the elemental practices to my students around the world. It has made me happy to witness the positive results of these practices in my students' personal lives and in their spiritual growth. I would like to thank all those students who have done the elemental practices.

I thank all those who have been long-time supporters of my work to bring the Bön teachings to the West, especially Gerald and Barbara Hines and Murari and Prachi Garodia. Without their continued support, it would have been much more difficult to develop the Ligmincha Institute and to accomplish its work.

I thank all the people at Snow Lion Publications for their generosity and kindness, particularly Christine Cox, whose wonderful editing skills have improved this book in every way.

I thank Mary Ellen McCourt for all her time and her skillful help with graphics. I thank Radek Dabrowski for supplying the line drawings in the

book, not once, but also a second time after the first drawings were lost in the mail.

For reading and commenting on the manuscript at different stages, and for offering many suggestions that have improved the book, I thank Laura Shekerjian, Alejandro Chaoul, Cecile Clover, and John Jackson. I am grateful to Steven Goodman for suggestions on an early version of the text and for corrections he made to the glossary. I thank Susan Yenchick for her support.

I especially want to thank my close friend and student, Mark Dahlby. Mark offered many thoughts and suggestions that have made this book more accessible to Western readers. Without his joyful effort, this book would not have been realized.



Shenla Odkar

THE PRAYER OF THE INTERMEDIATE STATE: THE PRECIOUS GARLAND

A OM HUNG

In the intermediate state that is this life, the present moment,
one does not realize one's own mind and is distracted by deluded activities,
does not remember impermanence and death,
pursues only the goals of this life and is bound
by the suffering of birth, old age, sickness, and death.
When this present illusory body suddenly meets its final illness,
may I self-liberate all attachment to objects of matter and mind.
O Master, from your compassion, bless me.
Bless me that I may cut the illusory visions of the *bardo*.
Bless me that I may reconnect the mother voidness and the son awareness.

Thereafter, in the intermediate state near death,
though surrounded by loved ones and relatives,
one journeys to the other dimension alone.
There is no way to prolong life even for a moment
when the four elements of this magical body dissolve.
O Master, from your compassion, bless me.
Bless me that I may cut the illusory visions of the bardo.
Bless me that I may reconnect the mother voidness and the son awareness.

When the energy of earth dissolves in the water,
one experiences the failing collapse of the body.
Visions of smoky movement and mirage arise.
When the yellow light that is one's own suddenly appears,
may I recognize it as the divine body of Salwa Rangyung (self-originated clarity).

O Master, from your compassion, bless me.
Bless me that I may cut the illusory visions of the bardo.
Bless me that I may reconnect the mother voidness and the son awareness.

When the energy of water dissolves in the fire,
the body pales and one is thirsty with a dry tongue
and there are visions of flooding water.
When the purity of the water arises as the blue light,
may I realize it as the divine body of Gawa Dondrup (joyful accomplishment).
O Master, from your compassion, bless me.
Bless me that I may cut the illusory visions of the bardo.
Bless me that I may reconnect the mother voidness and the son awareness.

When the energy of fire dissolves in the wind,
the body grows cold and the channels cannot be sustained.
One experiences visions like fireflies.
When the red light of one's self arises,
may I realize it as the divinity Chetak Ngomed (thing-less and without division).
O Master, from your compassion, bless me.
Bless me that I may cut the illusory visions of the bardo.
Bless me that I may reconnect the mother voidness and the son awareness.

When the wind energy dissolves into consciousness,
the breath stops, the eyes roll upward,
and one experiences visions like the blowing out of butter lamps.
When the green self-light arises,
may I realize it as the virtuous divinity Gelha Garchug (the richness of dancing activities).
O Master, from your compassion, bless me.
Bless me that I may cut the illusory visions of the bardo.
Bless me that I may reconnect the mother voidness and the son awareness.

When the consciousness dissolves into the base of all,
internal sense organs and their external objects cease.
Then there is a vision like the cloudless sky.
When the clear light bardo arises,
may I realize it as Kunang Chabpa (pervading all visions).
O Master, from your compassion, bless me.

Bless me that I may cut the illusory visions of the bardo.
Bless me that I may reconnect the mother voidness and the son awareness.

When the six consciousnesses and their six objects dissolve in the heart
and the darkness arises and the rain of blood pools in the lake of blood
and the great sound arises and the great light arises,
may I realize all my visions as illusion.
May I become realized in the self-arising innate awareness.
O Master, from your compassion, bless me.
Bless me that I may cut the illusory visions of the bardo.
Bless me that I may reconnect the mother voidness and the son awareness.

When consciousness remains as an orphan, with no support,
and the vision of the fearful lord of death in the other dimension arises,
and the delusory visions of sound, light, and rays arise,
bless me that I may liberate in the intermediate state
by realizing these as self-arising self-energy.
O Master, from your compassion, bless me.
Bless me that I may cut the illusory visions of the bardo.
Bless me that I may reconnect the mother voidness and the son awareness.

Bless me that I may recognize all vision as illusion.
Bless me that I may cut the possibility of birth in the lower realms.
Bless me that I may realize the single essence of the three times.
Bless me that I may obtain the buddhahood of the three *kayas*.
Bless me that I may achieve the five wisdoms.
Bless me that I may help countless sentient beings.
O Master, from your compassion, bless me.
Bless me that I may cut the illusory visions of the bardo.
Bless me that I may reconnect the mother voidness and the son awareness.

from: *Gur zhog chun pos mdzad pa'i smon lam rin chen phreng ba*

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INTRODUCTION

I grew up strongly connected to the power of the natural world. The way we lived required it. We didn't have running water or electric stoves. We carried all our water in buckets from the nearby spring, heated our buildings with wood fires, and cooked over an open flame. We had a small garden patch where we grew vegetables—onions and tomatoes—and so we put our hands in the earth. The summer rains meant both flooding and water for the rest of the year. Nature wasn't preserved in parks or kept on the other side of the window, and contact with the elements wasn't for pleasure, though there was pleasure in it. There was a direct relationship between our lives and the fire, the wood, the water, and the weather. We were dependent on the raw elements of nature for survival.

Perhaps that dependence helped our culture, like most indigenous cultures, understand the natural world to be sacred and alive with beings and forces, visible and invisible. During Losar, the Tibetan celebration of the new year, we did not drink champagne to celebrate. Instead, we went to the local spring to perform a ritual of gratitude. We made offerings to the *nagas*, the water spirits who activated the water element in the area. We made smoke offerings to the local spirits associated with the natural world around us.

Beliefs and behaviors like ours evolved long ago and are often seen as primitive in the West. But they are not only projections of human fears onto the natural world, as some anthropologists and historians suggest. Our way of relating to the elements originated in the direct experiences by our sages and common people of the sacred nature of the external and internal elements. We call these elements earth, water, fire, air, and space.

My purposes in writing this book are threefold: to contribute to a growing respect for the natural environment that must mature if we are to avoid

degrading the quality of human life; to make the traditional Tibetan world view available to modern Westerners; and to show that understanding the elements is one key to understanding spiritual practice. By knowing the elements and their relationship to them, those who follow the spiritual path can know why they do the practices they do, what practices are needed and when, and in what situations, certain practices may be ineffective or even a hindrance.

The teachings in this book originate in the Tibetan Bön tradition. The book is centered on practices that represent three dimensions of the spiritual journey. These are traditional practices in Tibetan Bön and Buddhism and are meant to be applied, not just understood intellectually. Sometimes we think that we really know something when we have information about it, that we understand anything we can talk about. If we do not actually do practice, but only read about practice, it's analogous to owning medicine and talking about it rather than taking it and being cured.

Most of the practices in this book are supportive practices. They enhance the quality of life, promote healing, and offer some protection from harm and illness. They can keep us alert rather than dull, relaxed rather than agitated. They can contribute to our health, vigor, and pleasure in life. This is good and worthwhile. However, the practices are most importantly used to develop spiritually. They change our perspectives about our relationships to the natural world and to our own experiences; they open and expand our views. And they support our meditation practices. When the elements are out of balance, it's difficult to do meditative practice and we are more likely to be forced to work with illness, agitation, dullness, or distraction. The practices presented here help us to overcome external obstacles as well as disturbances in the mind and energy by balancing the elements in the dimension of the individual. When the elements are balanced, it's easier to abide in the nature of mind, in the buddha-nature, which is the final method and goal of the spiritual journey.

The practices and the theory of the practices are presented together. This arrangement reflects our tradition, where it is taught that how we see the world determines the quality of our practices and our lives.

I have tried to include practices that can be done in daily life. We don't need to go on retreat to do them, though we can. We don't need to cancel all the dates in our appointment books. The elements are all that exist, so we can always do practice with the elements, at any time, wherever we are, whatever we are doing.

I've made the assumption in this book that the reader is familiar with cer-

tain terms. For example, I use *Dzogchen* and its translation as "Great Perfection" interchangeably. I also use "innate awareness," "non-dual awareness," and "non-dual presence" as equivalent translations for *rigpa*, and "nature of mind" and the "natural state" as synonyms for the inseparability of emptiness and luminosity, the buddha-nature which is our true nature.

I have included quotes from traditional texts. The translations are not exact. I translated them for meaning rather than as word-for-word conversions. I have included references in the bibliography so that anyone interested can look at the Tibetan source material. Tibetan words that are in the glossary are italicized on their first use in the text. Many of the terms used in this book are explained in greater detail in my earlier books, *Wonders of the Natural Mind* and *The Tibetan Yogas of Dream and Sleep*, both published by Snow Lion Publications.

There is a great deal of information in this book. When you feel full, stop reading. Take time to digest, to match what you are reading to your experience. This is how to make the teaching part of your life.

THE BÖN RELIGION

Because so many people in the West are unfamiliar with Bön, I want to tell a little of its history. As with the history of any tradition, any people, any country, there are multiple versions of its past. The oral tradition asserts that the Bön religion began over seventeen thousand years ago, but modern scholars believe it began much later. In either case, Bön is recognized as the indigenous religion of Tibet and the origin of many of its spiritual traditions.

Yungdrung Bön (Eternal Bön) was the first complete path of spiritual liberation in Tibet. It began with the Buddha Tonpa Shenrab, born in the Mushen family. His father was Gyalbon Thokar; his mother was Yoche Gyalzhema. They lived in Tazig 'Olmo Lung Ring, thought by some to have been a land to the northwest of Tibet and by others to be the mythical land of Shambhala.

Tradition asserts that there were three "doors" or sources of Bön. The first was Tazig 'Olmo Lung Ring. The second was in Central Asia, possibly concentrated in the area where Persia used to be. Bön historians believe that Bön was widespread in Central Asia before Islam came to dominate the cultures there and that many of the antiquities uncovered in Central Asia and assumed to be Buddhist are actually Bön. The third was the kingdom of Zhang Zhung, which included a large part of what is now western

Tibet. The teachings began in the first door, spread through the second, and finally were taught in Zhang Zhung and Tibet.

Legend has it that Tonpa Shenrab came to the land that is now southern Tibet searching for horses stolen by a demon. He visited the sacred mountain Kong-po, a mountain still circumambulated by Bön pilgrims in the counter-clockwise Bön way. When Tonpa Shenrab arrived, he found a primitive people whose spiritual practice was based on appeasement of spirits through animal sacrifice. He put an end to animal sacrifice, teaching the people to substitute animal forms made from barley flour in their offerings, a practice still current with Tibetans of all traditions.

As is true for all buddhas, Tonpa Shenrab taught according to the capacity of the students. Realizing that the people of Zhang Zhung were not ready for the higher teachings of liberation, he taught only the lower, shamanic vehicles and prayed that through diligence, devotion, and application they would prepare themselves for the higher vehicles of sutra, tantra, and Dzogchen. And in time, all the teachings of Tonpa Shenrab reached Zhang Zhung.

Centuries later, during the period of the second Tibetan king, Mu Khri Tsenpo, many of Bön's tantric and Dzogchen cycles of teachings were translated from Zhang Zhung into Tibetan. Although the teachings had existed in Tibet for centuries through oral transmission, this was the first time they had been recorded in the written Tibetan language. For a long time Zhang Zhung and the Zhang Zhung language were thought by Western scholars to be only mythical, but this view is being reassessed as more fragments of the Zhang Zhung language are discovered.

The first seven Tibetan kings are supposed to have died without leaving physical bodies, a sign of great spiritual attainment. Some scholars believe that they achieved the "body of light," a sign of enlightenment particular to Dzogchen, which would suggest that the Dzogchen teachings already existed in Tibet at that time. Buddhist scholars believe that Dzogchen came from India, and Bön in fact recognizes one tradition of Dzogchen as reaching Tibet through India, though its main Dzogchen teaching cycles originated in Zhang Zhung.

The main teachings of Bön are included in The Nine Ways, also known as the Nine Vehicles. These are nine categories of teachings, each category with its characteristic view, practices, and results. For instance, the lower vehicles have to do with medicine, astrology, divination, and so on. Above them are the teachings of sutra and tantra. And finally, the highest vehicle is the teaching of Dzogchen, the Great Perfection. There are traditionally three

versions of the Nine Ways, known as the Southern, Central, and Northern Treasures. The information on shamanism in this book comes primarily from the Southern Treasure. The Central Treasure is very close to the Buddhist Nyingma teachings. The Northern Treasure is lost. Each Treasure includes some aspects of the sutra, tantra, and Dzogchen teachings. In addition, there are fifteen volumes that contain the main biographies of the Buddha Tonpa Shenrab.

According to Chinese statistics, Bön is the second most populous religious group in Tibet and Bön-pos are found in all regions of Tibet. The ancient teachings are still practiced widely by both monastics and lay yogic practitioners, and even in the twentieth century there have been Bön masters who have attained the "rainbow body." This is the ultimate sign of full realization in the Dzogchen tradition in which, at the time of death, the practitioner of great accomplishment releases the five gross elements that constitute the body. He or she dissolves them in their essence, which is the pure elemental light. During the process, the substantiality of the body dissipates in a display of multi-colored lights, which is why this is known as the rainbow body. Sometimes no corpse remains or only the hair and nails are left, but in any case the appearance of the rainbow body is the sign that the practitioner has attained the highest level of realization and is no longer bound by dualisms of matter and mind or life and death.

After the Chinese takeover of Tibet, a rigorous training program for Bön monks was started at Menri Monastery in Dolanji, H.P., India and at Tristsen Norbutse monastery in Kathmandu, Nepal. This was accomplished through the hard work of H. H. Lungtok Tenpa'i Nyima Rinpoche, Lopon Tenzin Namdak Rinpoche, and the elder monks. The educational program leads to the Geshe degree. The first class outside of Tibet, of which I was a member, graduated in 1986.

Many of the Bön traditions, along with many of the Tibetan Buddhist traditions, have been lost under the current political rule of the Chinese in Tibet. Many other traditions are threatened. However, both Tibetan Bön and Buddhism are taking root in India and Nepal and are now spreading throughout the world.

As some readers may know, there are many misconceptions about the Bön religion, even among Tibetan Buddhists. Bön suffered the fate of many indigenous religions, a fate similar to that of the religions of Europe and the Americas when Christianity was introduced. When a new religion spreads

in a culture, it often supports its growth by describing the native religion in negative terms, as something to be overcome and rejected.

I have noticed that many Tibetans, even high lamas who have no familiarity with the Bön tradition or literature, readily pass on uninformed negative judgements about Bön. I do not understand this attitude. Of course such prejudice is not only directed towards Bön—prejudice exists between the schools of Tibetan Buddhism, too. I add this note for all students of Bön so that they will know about this sad prejudice before they encounter it. I hope that as Tibetan forms of spirituality move from Tibet to the rest of the world, the narrow-mindedness of prejudice can be left behind.

Happily, there are many Buddhist Tibetans, laymen and monks, ordinary householders and high lamas, who are heirs to the non-sectarian movement that flourished in Tibet in the nineteenth century. Most outstanding of the Tibetan voices speaking today for tolerance and understanding is that of His Holiness, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, who has formally recognized Bön as one of the five major spiritual traditions of Tibet. On many occasions he has offered encouragement and support to H. H. Lungtok Tenpa'i Nyima Rinpoche and Lopon Tenzin Namdak Rinpoche, asking that they work to preserve the ancient Bön heritage as a treasure for all Tibetans.

People in the West are adopting an open attitude to Bön as they learn more of it. In its texts and traditions they find a balance of study and practice, faith and critical inquiry. They also find that Bön, rooted in times prior to recorded history, has fully developed traditions of shamanism, philosophy and debate, monasticism, tantric transmissions and yogas, and the highest teachings of the Great Perfection. Although this book is primarily for practitioners, I hope that scholars will get a sense of the depth and variety of the spiritual traditions of Bön.

The practices of the spiritual path, if done with correct understanding and application, bring results. Results develop faith. When faith is strong and based on certainty, it furthers practice. Faith and practice together lead to wisdom and happiness. It is my sincere wish that this book contribute to the well-being and spiritual progress of all who read it.

ONE

THE ELEMENTS

In Tibetan culture, the five elements—earth, water, fire, air, and space—are considered to be the substance of all things and processes. The study of their interactions permeates Tibetan thought. An understanding of the elements forms the basis of medicine, astrology, the calendar, and psychology, and it underlies the spiritual traditions of shamanism, tantra, and Dzogchen.

The names of the elements are symbolic. They suggest a description of particular qualities and modes of action by analogy to the familiar elements of the natural environment. As in most cultures, the Tibetan tradition uses the natural elements as fundamental metaphors to describe forces both internal and external. For example, physical properties are assigned to the elements: earth is solidity; water is cohesion; fire is temperature; air is motion; and space is the spatial dimension that accommodates the other four active elements. In addition, the elements are correlated to different emotions, temperaments, directions, colors, tastes, body types, illnesses, thinking styles, and character. From the five elements arise the five senses and the five fields of sensual experience; the five negative emotions and the five wisdoms; and the five extensions of the body. They are the five primary *pranas* or vital energies. They are the constituents of every physical, sensual, mental, and spiritual phenomenon.

The metaphoric use of the elements is also common in Western languages: a person can be earthy or spacy, fluid or fiery. Anger is hot, sadness is watery. Attitudes can be airy or grounded.

But in the Tibetan traditions the elements are not only understood metaphorically. Rather, the elements in nature concretely represent a subtler and more fundamental discrimination of five aspects of the primordial energy of existence. There is nothing in any dimension that is not composed wholly of the interactions of these five aspects of energy. The elemental processes

create the universe, sustain it, and ultimately destroy it. This is also true for individual beings: at birth the play of the elements creates the body, mind, and personality. At death these dissolve as the elements collapse into one another. And during the whole of life, the individual's relationship to the elements determines the quality of experience.

There is little benefit in the idea of the elements if it remains an abstraction, a way to divide everything into five. An understanding of the elements becomes useful when it is related to experience and then used positively to affect the quality of our lives. But before we can apply our understanding, we first need to become familiar with the elements by initially relating to them through images and metaphors.

Our human bodies have evolved over hundreds of thousands of years through their relationships to the physical environment. That history is evident in the satisfaction we experience in natural beauty; interaction with the natural elements can heal and refresh. We enjoy the clean earth of the desert and the rich soil of the garden. We go for vacations to ocean, river, or lake. We relax in a bath. We are entranced by flame and enjoy the warmth of the sun or the fire in a fireplace. We take a deep breath to calm ourselves, sigh to release sadness, visit the mountains to be invigorated by the pure air. And the sky, the external image of space, fascinates us—the color and the weather in it, the light that pervades it. We relax in wide, open spaces and feel secure in close, comfortable spaces. Or we feel anxious in large spaces and claustrophobic in closed spaces. One way or another we react.

When deprived of one of the elements, we yearn for it. In a desert, we are joyful when encountering water. After being at sea for a long time, we want to kiss the earth when we land. When cold, we run toward fire. The five raw elements affect us profoundly on a deep and instinctive level, but we usually get lost in the surface of these experiences, not realizing that experience with the elements can connect us to the sacred and can lead to healing, balance, and a deeper understanding of ourselves.

Five elements may seem too few to account for all the diversity in things and beings, but the five elements are five discriminations that continually branch into more subtle divisions.

This understanding can be applied to the body, for example. There are five major appendages to the torso: two legs, two arms, and a head. Each of these then branch into a further five: the arms and legs into five fingers and five toes, the head into the five sense organs.

One traditional formulation describes the flesh as earth; the blood and other bodily fluids as water; the electrical and chemical energies and meta-

bolic heat as fire; the breath, oxygen, and other gases as air; and the space the body occupies and the spaces in the body, as well as the consciousness, as the space element. Each of these five could be further analyzed in terms of the elements: in the flesh alone can be found solidity (earth), cohesion (water), temperature (fire), motility (air), and awareness (space). These divisions can also be applied to blood: its solids, fluidity, temperature, movement, space. And of course each of the subdivisions can be applied to further fivefold analysis until, ultimately, anything can be reduced to the essential five elemental energies.

The interactions of the five elements give rise not only to parts of the system, to individual bodies and planets and computer software and trees, but also to all realms of existence in every dimension. The dynamism of the five elements lies under the complexities of all that exists.

THREE LEVELS OF SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

The use of elements in spiritual practice varies according to whether the approach is through shamanism, tantra, or Dzogchen; that is, the external, internal, or secret levels.

External

Externally, the elements are not only the raw elements of our sensual experience—the earth we live on, the water we drink, the fire that warms us, the air we breathe, and the space through which we move—they are also the spirits connected with the elements. These include goddesses, elemental spirits, and other beings. Working with these beings is a common practice in Tibetan culture and is the domain of what I'm calling shamanism, though I want to be clear that there is no word like "shamanism" in the Tibetan language.

Tibetan traditions of working with spirits originated in Bön but are now found throughout Tibetan culture. Many decisions made by Tibetan officials and high lamas of monasteries of all sects are made partially through consulting human oracles and non-physical beings. Tibetans do not like to think of this practice as shamanism because for some Tibetans the word is related to animal sacrifice or to a more primitive spirituality. What I am addressing here has nothing to do with such things. Rather, these are practices taught in the first four of the nine levels of spiritual teachings of the Southern Treasury of Bön teachings.

Internal

The internal elements are the elemental energies rather than their forms. In

our bodies these are the physical energies that pump our blood, digest our food, and fire our neurons, and also the more subtle energies upon which our health and capacities are based and depend. Some of these subtle energies are now recognized and studied in the West through a new familiarity with the Eastern medical models that inform acupuncture and the new uses Western medical researchers are finding for different vibratory treatments. There are also much subtler energies that cannot be detected by physical measurement but that are available to direct experience through yogic and contemplative disciplines. This subtler level of elemental energy not only is found inside the body but is also the dimension of energy that skilled practitioners of feng shui—the Chinese art of appropriate placement of objects—sense in the environment. These are also the energies that build in group phenomena like crowd behavior and patriotism and so on. Tantra works with these energies by guiding them in the body for specific purposes using direct yogic means involving physical posture, breathing, visualization, and mantra. Tantra recognizes the energies as divine forces.

Secret

The secret dimension of the elements exists beyond duality and is therefore hard to describe with language, which necessarily divides experience into separate objects. This most subtle dimension of the elements is the radiance of being, the "five pure lights," aspects of the luminosity that, inseparably united with emptiness, is the basis of everything. The practices and teachings associated with this level of the elements are from Dzogchen, the Great Perfection.

These three dimensions are separated only conceptually. This is an important point to keep in mind when reading this book. It is a mistake to think that external, internal, and secret can truly be divided, or that external practice, tantra, and Dzogchen are mutually exclusive. Confusion on this point leads to many of the great divisions in belief: religions that disregard or mistrust the life of the body, secular cultures that do not recognize the sacred nature of the earth, or preoccupation with material well-being that ignores spiritual development. All of life is important and arises from the sacred elements.

The view of Dzogchen is ultimate and contains the others, but this doesn't mean that the lower views should be neglected. Believing that everything is insubstantial luminosity is very different from being able to walk through walls. The highest practice is the one that is most effective, not necessarily the one categorized as "higher."

RELATING TO THE SACRED

In shamanism, tantra, and Dzogchen, the elements are considered to be sacred, the underlying forces of existence. Because they are sacred, all that arises from them—and that is everything—is also sacred. External nature is sacred and the body is sacred. The elements without and within arise together, from the same source. The warmth of the sun and the warmth of the heart are different in degree, not in kind. The water of the oceans is not different from the water of our bodies. Our flesh is formed from the elements of the earth and it will dissolve back into the earth. The air in our lungs is the same air the hawk rides. The space in which the universe arises, the space our living room couch occupies, and the space in which our thoughts arise is the same space and is sacred. And all that is in space—substantial and insubstantial, matter and mind—is the elements.

As the elements in the body are sacred, the consciousnesses that arise from them are also sacred. Whether of wisdom or passion, dream or nightmare, the living experience of beings is a display of the pure elements interacting with awareness. The innate awareness, too, is integrated with the elements. It is the purest and most subtle level of the five elements in perfect balance, the quintessence of the luminosity of the base of existence.

Sometime in the history of the West, the sense of sacred relationship was lost for many people. We can witness sacred relationships, or read about them, in the shaman's relationship to the natural world or in the tantric practitioner's relationship to the deities, but often we don't have such a relationship in our own lives.

Ask yourself what "sacred" means to you. Are you in any relationship you regard as sacred? If so, is it based in your own sense of the sacred or is it composed of behaviors you learned from others? What in your life do you truly believe to be sacred?

Without a sense of the sacred, it is difficult to have faith in religious instruction. In Tibet it is said that if one treats one's master like a dog, the teachings are as worthless as rotten food. If one treats one's master like a friend, the teachings nourish like fresh food. If one treats one's teacher like a deity, the teachings are divine nectar. Similarly, if we relate to the natural world as a collection of lifeless mechanical processes, it is lifeless for us. If we relate to our bodies as machines, they are machines to us. If we relate to religion as a fantasy, it is a fantasy to us. But if we relate to the natural world as alive, full of spirits and elemental beings, the natural world speaks to us. If, as in tantra, the body is regarded as a divine palace and the result of great good fortune, as the best possible vehicle for reaching enlightenment,

it becomes a vehicle that can carry us beyond death. If we relate to the *dharma*, the spiritual teachings, as to sacred teachings that will lead us on the path to truth, the dharma in fact leads us to truth. Relating to the elements—to the natural world and our bodies and minds—as sacred, they become sacred. This is not just a psychological trick. It's a recognition of our real situation.

Sacred relationships are defined not only in terms of how we relate to what is outside of us. Relating to the sacred also brings us to the deepest sense of ourselves, to what is sacred in us. Shamans connected to earth find in themselves the connection to all life, to the powers and forces that control the world. Tantric practitioners find that devotion to the deities leads to the recognition that their deeper selves are the deities. In guru yoga, the student must find the mind of the master within. Sacred relationship finds something sacred outside, but that which recognizes the sacred is the sacred inside.

We are in relationship with everything. That's what this life is—relationship with everything. We may have many friendly relationships that are nurturing and helpful, and that is good. Those relationships support us and fulfill us as humans. But if we have no sacred relationship to the environment, to people, to religious images, to mantras, and so on, it means the sacred aspect of our lives is dying, or buried, or hasn't been accessed. It hasn't been enriched or expressed. It doesn't arise in our internal experience because it hasn't found a match in the external world; there is nothing to evoke it or fuel it. So it disappears from our lives and our cultures or becomes an abstraction or is reduced to mythology or psychology.

It's easy to lose the sense of the sacred in the modern world. Many of us live out of touch with the power of the natural world, knowing it as something fenced in parks and tamed in gardens. Behind the reflected light of the city, night is no longer dark and vast. Our houses are temperature-controlled. Many of us have lost faith in religion and live in a world in which life has been reduced to a chemical reaction, the stars are dead material processes, and there is no life after the death of the body. The societies of the West have created wonderful technologies, arts, and sciences, but living in a dead world, relying on entertainment for fleeting satisfaction, is a sad and unnecessary price to pay for those advances.

The lack of relationship to the sacred can be an obstruction on the spiritual path. We learn something—let's say the physical practices in this book—and we feel better. So we treat them simply as something that makes us feel good, like going for a walk or taking a bike ride.

We may interpret the shamanic practices as only symbols used to manipulate mechanical psychological processes. But when we really need help, we don't turn to what we believe is only psychological; this is because it seems smaller than we are in our totality. In a sacred relationship—to the elements, the deities, the master, the holy texts—we turn to something bigger than ourselves, bigger than our problems. We turn to something sacred, of greater value and meaning than our depression or anxiety or self-hatred or disappointment.

If we spend a lot of time in relationships characterized by mistrust, anger, disrespect, and so on, every part of our lives is affected. We see things in a more negative light. When we spend a lot of time in sacred relationships, our life is affected positively. Our painful feelings are not so large. We start to see the sacred core of every being.

Developing faith and gratitude opens the door to sacred relationships. It's good to reflect on the long lineage of the teachings, the men and women who followed the path over the centuries. They traveled far on the path because they recognized it as a sacred journey into the center of themselves and the world. And now it is our turn. We are fortunate to have an inclination to lead the spiritual life and to have found appropriate teachings from a living tradition. Opening our hearts and minds to the teachings, we start to open ourselves in many dimensions. We open ourselves to sacred energies and are healed and blessed by them. Our well-being becomes independent of external circumstances. The world becomes larger and all of it recognized as alive. There is no longer the dead matter universe of the nihilists or the impure material world of the dualists. We connect to the sacred, creative energies whose display is existence itself.

How can we develop the sense of the sacred? By remembering that the source of all is sacred, that space and light are sacred. Every appearance is beautiful if we go beyond prejudice and recognize the vibrant, radiant nature of phenomena. Remember that all beings have the buddha-nature. Remember the sacredness of the religious tradition. Spend time in nature, particularly places special to you, and open yourself to the beauty of the natural world. Begin each practice period with prayer and open your heart. End each practice period by dedicating yourself to the benefit of all beings. Engage in the practice as a way to help alleviate the suffering of all those you care about. Spiritual practice is an activity meant to benefit all; it is not only for yourself. Look into the night sky when the stars can be seen, feel the immensity and magnificence of the universe. Think about the complexity of your own body, the mysterious functions that support your existence.

Broaden your mind enough and you necessarily come to mysteries that are so much bigger than everyday concerns that to encounter them is to experience awe, to experience the sacred.

When working with the elements, we are working with the ground of the experience and the experiencer. To recognize the elements in the natural world, their beauty and interplay, to enter the sacred dance of the elements, is to inhabit a living world full of mystery and potential.

THE FIVE PURE LIGHTS

The most subtle dimension of the five elements is known as the "five pure lights." In the Dzogchen tradition there are many texts of teachings about the elements. From the *Zhang Zhung Nyan Gyud*, the primary cycle of Dzogchen teachings in the Bön tradition, I am drawing from two main texts which go into detail about the five lights. These are *The Six Lamps* (*Sgron-ma drug*) and *The Mirror of the Luminous Mind* (*'Od-gsal sems-kyi me-long*). One teaching, which is partially a story, explains how the elemental energies, though always pure in themselves, come to be perceived as substantial. It is also the story of how, in the intermediate state (bardo) between death and birth, the individual goes toward either the delusions of *samsara* or the freedom of *nirvana*. On another level, it is the description of what can be done, in any moment, to end ensnarement in karmic visions and remain in the natural state of mind. The teaching says something like this:

For each of us, everything begins with the primordial space, the Great Mother from which all things arise, in which all things exist, and into which all things dissolve. In this space there is movement. What causes it, no one knows. The teachings only say "the winds of karma moved." This is the movement of the subtlest level of *lung* or *prana*, the energy that pervades infinite space without characteristics or divisions. Inseparably united with the flow of prana is the flow of primordial awareness, pure and without identity. In this pure awareness five lights arise.

The five lights are aspects of primordial luminosity. These are the five pure lights, the most subtle level of the elements. We talk about the light and color of the five pure lights but this is symbolic. The five pure lights are more subtle than visible light, more subtle than anything perceived by the eye, more subtle than any energy measured or perceived by any means. They are the energies from which all other energies, including visible light, arise.

The white or colorless light is space, the green light is air, the red light is fire, the blue light is water, and the yellow light is earth. These are the five aspects of pure luminosity, the rainbow-like energies of the single sphere of existence (*tigle nyag chik*).

If the five lights are experienced dualistically, as objects of a perceiving subject, they appear to grow more substantial. The five lights don't become grosser, but through the distortions of dualistic vision the individual perceives them as grosser. As the elements seem to grow toward greater substantiality, they are further discriminated, and through their interactions they manifest all phenomena, including the subject and objects that make up all dualistic experience.

Eventually the five lights become the raw, natural physical elements and five inclusive categories of qualities belonging to external reality. They become the different dimensions of existence that are various realms in which beings with and without form exist. Internally the five lights seem to thicken and form the organs, the five branches of the body, the five fingers of each hand, the five toes of each foot, the five senses, and the five sense fields. The five lights become the five negative emotions if we remain deluded, or the five wisdoms and the five buddha families if we recognize their purity.

This is not a story about a creation that happened in the distant past. It is about how we live as individual beings and about ignorance and enlightenment. If the five lights are recognized as a non-dual, unceasing manifestation of the pure basis of existence (*kunzhi*), nirvana begins. If the five lights are perceived dualistically and thought to exist externally, as objects of a subject, samsara begins. The awareness does not become delusory or become enlightened—it remains non-dual and pure—but the qualities that arise in it can be either positive or negative. If the awareness integrates and identifies with the pure qualities, a buddha arises from the base; if with the impure, a samsaric being arises. In this moment, right now, the process is ongoing.

Depending on whether we integrate our immediate experience with non-dual awareness or cling to the false separation of our selves as subjects experiencing external objects and entities, we will be in the non-dual natural state or in the deluded mind.

The story of the five lights can teach us how to work with experience. What manifests in experience usually begins on subtle levels and moves to grosser ones. This is true for any process that leads to new things or new entities, whether it's the birth of an idea or the birth of a planet. The physical body of

an individual begins in desire that results in sex that brings two tiny cells together that develop into the full human body. Language begins with pure sound and leads to meaning and all the philosophies and poetry of humans. Physicists tell us that the universe is born from energy condensed in a dimensionless point, and a process of increasingly complex structures arise as stars, planets, and organisms. Problems often begin from a misunderstanding such as a difference in religious or political ideas and result in arguments, life-long animosities, and even wars.

Karmic dispositions and conditioning determine the nature of the world we inhabit: What we experience externally is a projection of what is internal. This world is hell for some people, for others it is heaven.

Bön and Buddhist philosophy tell us that—beyond all these differences—all things and beings are empty of inherent existence and are finally entirely insubstantial. Modern physics agrees that matter is made of energy and space.

We can say that everything is insubstantial or empty, but of course, in our experience things are substantial and separate. Stand in front of an oncoming truck insisting that it is an insubstantial phenomenon and you'll be run over. But we must begin to change our minds about the condition of phenomena. When we continue to react to experience as if it is made of solid things and discrete substantial entities, the continuation of the ordinary world is assured. This is not just abstract philosophy. If we react to our problems as if they are real and solid, they are so, in our experience. But if we recognize them to be fleeting and mirage-like, a display of the sacred elemental energies in vast space, they are no longer problems.

Because the story of the five pure lights is not the story that science tells us, it can be mistaken for fantasy, for something not true—by which is usually meant that it is not fact. The five pure lights can't be measured or weighed; they aren't facts in the way that a car is, or a rain storm. But facts are not truth. The spiritual teachings continually point this out. While we accept it as a fact that we exist surrounded by dead substantial things and living substantial entities, the dharma tells us that there are no substantial things nor are there separate, intrinsically existing entities. No one can show us love as a fact, but when we are in love there is no doubt that love is real.

The five elements are true the way love is true and also the way a car is true. A car is made from the elements: the hard earth of the metal, the water of the gas and oil, the fire of the combustion, the air that allows the gas to burn, and the space that allows the car to exist. Stop thinking of it as "car" for a minute and instead see it as the interplay of the five elements. This is how to think about the elements.

The story of the five lights and the stories later in the book are not meant to entertain, nor should they be thought of as factual. Rather, this story is truer than fact, and that's why, if it is really understood, it can change the way we experience the world. With a deep understanding of how the apparently solid world is actually the play of pure elemental light, peace can be found even in a troubled world, problems can be eradicated before they manifest, and ultimately the nature of the mind can be fully realized. There is a sequence or flow to all things that arise. Knowing this, one knows how to stop negative processes and initiate and support positive processes.

THE DISSOLUTION OF THE ELEMENTS

Substantial manifestation begins in the subtle, non-physical dimension of the elements and moves toward grosser manifestation. This is the creative process by which things and entities arise. The death process, described in the prayer at the front of this book, moves in the reverse direction, from substantial to insubstantial. In each stage of death, dictated by the dissolution of the internal elements, there are particular physical and visionary phenomena experienced by the dying person. These correlate to the energy of the earth element dissolving in water, water in fire, fire in air, air in space. Tantric practitioners regularly train in the death process so that when death occurs they can find the path through it, maintain awareness, and fully realize the practice.

This process of dissolution is not only related to death, but also to the processes of sleeping and waking. Just as death can, for the prepared practitioner, reveal what is unchanging and unborn, so can the dissolution of the elements in experience lead to the realization that what fundamentally exists is space and pure light.

UNDERSTANDING THROUGH THE ELEMENTS

Thinking in terms of the elements does not mean giving up our understanding of modern chemistry, physics, medicine, and psychology. The elements give us a more fundamental metaphor that helps to explain the dynamics that lie beneath these different disciplines. Through an understanding of the elements we can see that apparently different dimensions of experience are really only subtler and grosser levels of the elements. An excess of fire, for example, manifests in physical, energetic, mental, and spiritual dimensions. These dimensions are not actually distinct but increasingly refined (or grosser) presentations of the same fundamentals. So, fire is the life-giving energy of the sun as well as the life-destroying forest fire. It's the heat of the

digestive system, the creativity of the mind, the red light of the rainbow, the phenomenon of temperature, the emotions of hatred and desire, the warmth of compassion, the wisdom of discrimination, and one of the five most subtle and most fundamental aspects of being.

When we understand the inclusiveness of the five elements, we see that everything arises together, nothing is completely separate from anything else, and everything is affected by everything else. Anxiety can be calmed through ritual, drugs, exercise, meditation, love, massage, or a hot bath because anxiety is an excess of fire or air, or an insufficiency of earth or water. Anything that addresses this imbalance on any level will have an effect on every level. Of course at any one time one method may be more suitable than another. If you're bleeding badly, it's better to place a bandage or tie a tourniquet than to do yoga. Or if you're stuck in a bad mood, it's better to be able to work with the energy in your body than to go for surgery.

This view is accepted in the West, too, though not formulated this way. It has come to be common knowledge that illness in the body affects the mood and the mind, and the mind affects the emotions and the body. This seems obvious now, yet only recently has mainstream Western medicine begun to prescribe relaxation practices, exercise, meditation, and yoga to reverse heart disease and help with mood disorders.

Applying an understanding of the elements to our experience, we can usefully describe and examine any situation in any dimension. When we experience grosser or subtler levels of the elements, we are actually experiencing grosser or subtler levels of ourselves.

RELATING ONESELF TO THE ELEMENTS

As I wrote earlier, the elements are associated with emotions, personality types, cognitive styles, and with other aspects of experience, including visionary and meditative experience. The elements in these dimensions can be recognized directly once there is an understanding of what the elements are.

The following descriptions of the elements are not meant to be exhaustive but instead focus on the elements which are most directly accessible in experience. They do not include the medical aspects of the elements, which strongly affect experience but which are beyond the scope of this book. They point to emotional, energetic, and cognitive experiences you already have, and to patterns of behavior easily recognized in yourself or people you know. The descriptions emphasize the negative aspects of the elements because this is a book about healing and spiritual growth and the positive aspects need neither to be healed nor overcome.

The descriptions are general in order to make them widely applicable. It's more helpful to have a broad understanding of the elements in experience than to amass details of elemental correspondence, but it's also good to remember, while reading these simplifications, that the interactions of the elements are complex enough to give rise to everything. Each element contains the others and they also work with and against each other in diverse interactions. For example, if a fire is big, air supports it to grow greater; if a fire is small, the wind blows it out. Similarly, in our experience the elements support and destroy each other, and what happens depends on the particular situation.

The balance of the elements is always dynamic and changes to lesser and greater extent in different situations and conditions. It's also true that individuals can be particularly dominant or deficient in one or more of the elements. Look for consistent qualities of experience and habitual behaviors to recognize which of the elements are dominant or deficient in yourself.

Earth



Earth is the ground in our ordinary life. In the shamanic world view, it is usually the center of everything and is placed in the center of the mandala, both in graphic representations and in experience. (In tantra and Dzogchen, space is considered the ground and center.)

Most of the elemental qualities of earth can be grasped intuitively: heavy, solid, connected, secure. Earth has gravity. It can be rich and fertile when in harmony with the other elements—when there is enough heat, moisture, and good air. It can also be cold and unbearable without enough heat, arid and harsh without enough water, and stale and lifeless without enough air.

When earth is balanced in us, we feel stable, grounded, confident. We are neither too heavy nor too airy. We are rooted in our experience. We are not easily knocked off balance nor do we lose touch with what is important. When we know something, we do not lose that knowledge. Our faith is steady. Our intentions do not easily get swept aside by impulse and our efforts are consistent. We are responsible and can stand on our own. The higher dimension of this quality is to be grounded in pure being.

If there is too much earth, we are plodding, dull, lazy, and dim. Too solid. Unable to move. Our thinking is heavy, literal, and lacking creativity. Too much earth can result in depression or being stuck or resigned—in our

careers or relationships or spiritual practices. Then it becomes difficult to bring about change; we identify with problems and they seem very solid. We like to sleep. We try to meditate but nod off. And after we sleep, it can be hard to recall dreams in their entirety or at all. An excess of earth can make us insensitive and uninspired. Too much earth may mean being quiet all the time or, once having started talking, being unable to stop. Being late for every appointment or punctual to the minute can both be expressions of earth. Traditionally, the negative aspect of earth is ignorance.

If we have too little earth we are without anchor. We are flighty, spacy, or agitated. Unable to complete what we begin, we are ungrounded and dissatisfied. We're not at home anywhere; we're always looking for what will ground us and make us secure.

If we are deficient in earth, there are different ways to get grounded. Besides doing the exercises described later in this book, we can use additional approaches. For example, a secure home, a healthy relationship, or a solid job may help generate the sense of groundedness. Such corrections of the external situation can be appropriate in certain situations. Once security is developed externally, the sense of stability can serve as a base upon which to develop positive internal qualities. Usually it's best to find the positive quality inside oneself and manifest it outwardly, but sometimes reversing the sequence is helpful.

When we identify ourselves as substantial, physical entities, we will naturally try to ground ourselves in substantial, external conditions. When we identify as energetic beings, we will try to ground in our feelings. When we identify with pure awareness, we will find the ground in the nature of mind. The gross mind feels stability in solid earth; the more subtle, impersonal awareness grounds in space.

In terms of meditation practice, balanced earth is a great and necessary support. Even in the highest practices, such as the emptiness practices in sutra or Cutting Through (*trekchöd*) in Dzogchen, concentration practices that develop the qualities of earth and the stability of mind are recommended. The mind must be stable to progress on the path of meditation, and that stability arises as a development from strengthening the earth element. In the teachings it is said that people who are predominantly fire and air will quickly have spiritual experiences but they will also quickly lose them. People who are predominantly earth and water may be slower to have the experiences but, when they do, they are able to sustain and develop them and ultimately will develop faster.

If you are ungrounded in your meditative practice, develop the quality of earth through developing concentration. Practice steadiness of mind and

body. Eat heavier foods and avoid stimulants. Exercise. Usually we already know what to do to remedy problems in our practice but we don't do it. Making ourselves do what is best is one way to develop the consistency of the earth element.

Once stability of mind is developed through concentration, the unwanted movement of the mind slows and stops. Experience is clear and grounded in silence, not filled with buzzing thoughts. Lights and colors are sharper. If we are already introduced to the nature of mind, it becomes easier to continue in the natural state and to integrate the practice with all activities. Mindfulness becomes easy and can be maintained throughout the day, and ultimately throughout the night. When the mind is stable, insight naturally arises. This is the mind waking. It is not concentration but is a higher level of practice that arises from mental stability.

If there is too much earth, the approach is quite different. Eat lighter foods and try to avoid exhaustion. Practice being flexible in your thinking. Call on the elemental qualities of air and fire to generate flexibility, creativity, and liveliness.

When the earth element is fully developed in spiritual practice it becomes the wisdom of equanimity. This is the higher spiritual capacity of earth that allows the practitioner to be grounded and even in any situation, however extreme, and to recognize the luminous innate-awareness common to all experience.

Water



When the water element is in balance, there is comfort in ourselves and in our lives. We can be fluid, moving easily around and through the events and relationships of life. Balanced water is accepting of situations. It is joyful, content. The higher dimension of water in personal experience is the joy of being, a contentment with being alive that is innate rather than dependent on external circumstances. When we are connected to the joy of the water element, it manifests outwardly. We tend to be happy with the people we meet, the places we go. We enjoy life.

This joy can be lost in the unavoidable suffering that accompanies dualistic experience. And then we often look outside for it, believing that we will be comfortable in life when we get the new partner, job, riches, degree, recognition, or whatever the focus of the moment is. We think joy is found in having and doing, rather than in being.

In a person dominated by the water element there can be a lot of feeling and emotion and sometimes too much comfort. Too much comfort means letting responsibilities slide and floating through life. It means being lost in the comfort, losing presence, feeling content in situations that should be changed, or lacking productivity. There is a tendency not to work hard at what is difficult even if this means giving up what is valuable.

In meditation, too much water can diminish clarity. This is not the dullness and heaviness of earth but a kind of weak drifting that makes it difficult to accomplish tasks and enjoy their fruits.

Too much water can also result in our being lost in emotion, constantly tossed and turned on the waves of feeling, too sensitive to transient emotional states, weepy, or trapped in self-pity. Rather than being stuck in the comfort of the water element, we're stuck in the ebb and flow of emotion.

Too little water results in discomfort in ourselves, a lack of joy, and a lack of comfort around other people. Even if we're grounded in earth, if we have too little water it is a dry kind of solidity, without pleasure or appreciation. If both earth and water are deficient, we'll be dominated by fire or air or both, resulting in a lack of groundedness and excessive agitation. Too little water in meditation means internal discomfort in the practice and a loss of the joy in the spiritual path. The practice can become infertile and arid.

Practices that develop the positive aspects of water are the affective practices. For practitioners of the Tibetan traditions these would be Guru Yoga that opens the heart; the development of love and compassion; and the practice of giving and receiving. Spiritual practice can become a project of the mind alone if the heart is not involved; in the Tibetan traditions, compassion and love are considered necessary on the spiritual path. The highest development of the water element in spiritual practice is the development of the mirror-like wisdom.

Fire



The positive aspect of fire is the capacity to create, to initiate projects on every level, and to accomplish what creativity sets in motion. Intuition is related to fire as is enthusiasm and excitement. Balanced fire results in inspired undertakings, happiness with work, and accomplishment. Fire is related to a bliss and joy that is different from the joy of the water element, which is connected to contentment and acceptance. The joy of fire is more related to enthusiasm and bliss in the body, and the joy of waking

experiences. The higher experience of fire is the bliss of being. Its highest expression is the development of the wisdom of discrimination.

People with too much fire are easily agitated. Simple things ignite their irritability and they may react impulsively, lashing out without thinking, in angry words and gestures. Lacking tolerance, they can be annoyed by different religions, different races, different philosophies. They even can become annoyed by the way someone else is sitting or talking.

Because fire is the opposite of earth, too much fire often results in a lack of grounding. There is a lot of fast movement and instability. If there is also a lack of water, there can be a persistent discomfort and restlessness. It's difficult to sit still for five minutes; there's always something to do. Silence and stillness can be bothersome. There are difficulties sleeping. People with too much fire often like to talk a lot, and quickly. The next idea arises before the present one is articulated. Everything just keeps coming.

In meditation practice, too much fire results in thoughts that come fast and are hard to control. New ideas continually arise that seem too important to put aside. There's a lack of calm, a lack of peace, and too much agitation and restlessness. The agitation may be arise from a relative lack of water; the instability may be a lack of earth.

Without enough fire on the spiritual path, the practitioner lacks the energy and inspiration required to do the practice or has a difficult time finding joy and bliss in it. Instead, practice is done by rote, without the inspiration to make the leap to a new understanding or a new experience. As a result the development of the practice is much slower.

When fire is deficient, there is also a lack of vitality and a lack of inspiration. There is no enjoyment in work. There's no enthusiasm. Nothing new arises. Life can be a cycle of routine, plodding existence. Or, if fire is deficient when there is a preponderance of air, there can be movement, but it is repetitive and uncreative. Intellectually the person can be very sharp—due to the air—but not be able to create from what is learned.

Practices that develop fire are the inner heat (*tummo*), made famous through the documentation of practitioners sitting in snow, drying wet towels solely with the heat of their bodies; the practice of the external *rushen*, in which one surrenders to the experience of karmic tendencies in order to differentiate them from pure experience; and some of the physical yogas.

Air

Air is the element that carries change and, when it is developed, one can transform the negative into the positive, hate into love, jealousy into openness, greed into generosity, pride and egoism into peace. Air is related to



curiosity and learning and flexibility of intellect. In its highest aspect, it is the wisdom of accomplishment.

When air is dominant, the qualities of earth and water are usually deficient. Then there is little stability or contentment. It's difficult to stick to anything. If we are in one place, another looks better, and when we're in the new place, we want to be somewhere else. It's hard to accept things as they are, difficult to find and connect to comfort in what is. We may be jittery, unable to focus, worried, or flighty. Happiness gives way to unhappiness when even a small negativity is encountered. Resolution gives way to uncertainty. Belief crumbles easily. There is no inner gravity, so external influences drag us this way and that.

When air is deficient, it's easy to get stuck. Things become difficult to change. When a worry arises, it remains. When a simple concern arises, it lodges inside.

When there is balanced air, worry and concern give way to the next thing—a resolution is found. Balanced air allows us to be flexible. If things go wrong, we can still appreciate other aspects of experience: there can be bad news and a beautiful sky at the same time. Air allows the mind to move in new directions, to see things from different perspectives, and this allows the accumulation of knowledge and understanding. How fast you can change your negative anger or depression or annoyance or self-pity into something positive has to do with how developed your air element is.

The air element is also the prana, which carries the mind. This is why, in tantra and Dzogchen, physical movements and postures are recommended to control the air element in order to support particular experiences. When the air is disturbed, it's difficult for the mind to concentrate. It's difficult to sit for meditation. There is impatience. Questions arise and there is a need to ask them. When there is too much air, it is difficult to have experiences of the empty basis of everything, the kunzhi, because the mind and energy are darting this way and that, attracted to clarity and manifestation.

Air connects everything. It has to do with every kind of communication. As prana, elemental air pervades everywhere and everything; it is the essential energy of existence.

In Tibetan practices performed at the time of death, the lama summons the dead spirit through the air element, through inhalation. Once the spirit is contacted, the lama will help him or her to resolve what was left unresolved at death.

Some of the tantras talk about air in relation to magical powers. Magic always has to do with transformation; without the elemental energy of air there is no transformation. Traditionally, a lack of air is said to inhibit the ability to perform magic and makes it difficult to direct one's rebirth.

When there is a lack of air, there's often a lack of progress in spiritual practices and an inability to transform what arises into practice.

Practices that develop air are the *tsa lung* practices that work with the channels and prana in the body. These include the physical yoga of *trul khor*; the *pho wa,* or transference of consciousness; contemplative breathing, during which the central channel is opened using the breath and visualization; and so on. Some of these practices are described in detail later in this book. In general, practices related to air separate the pure and impure prana, which also means separating the pure and impure mind states. Air is the element that allows for the discrimination and separation of these states.

Space



Everything arises from space, exists in space, and dissolves into space. In us that sacred element of space manifests as awareness. Experience is what arises in awareness, as the content of awareness, but it is not something other than awareness.

When the space element is balanced in us, there is room in life; whatever arises can be accommodated. There is enough time, enough emotional capacity, enough tolerance. The elements of experience all fit; they are neither too much nor too little. We are not dissociated from experience nor completely caught by it. Rather than running after or away from the content of experience, we are more rooted in ourselves or the one who is experiencing.

When space dominates, we are "spacy" and can't connect to the contents of space, that is, to the other elements. This state is not an integration with the nature of mind. We simply lose connection. There can be a loss of meaning, not from the depression that can happen when earth dominates, but from a kind of superficial connection to life that leaves us rootless and drifting. Too much space results in a lack of awareness, a lack of presence. We become lost and out of touch.

While too much space causes us to lose touch with the qualities that arise in space, too little space leaves us dominated by whatever arises. Ev-

erything seems solid and impenetrable. Small problems can be overwhelming, big problems devastating. Too little space makes it easier for another element to dominate and to determine our reactions.

A person with balanced space may work full time, have a family, take care of a home, meditate and engage in spiritual practices, and accommodate everything. There is enough space for everything. Another person in the same situation but with too little space can't stand it; the work is too much, the kids are a bother, there's no time for friends, there's no time to cook and no way to relax. And a third person, in the same situation but dominated by space, drifts through life; the job isn't important, the kids are distant, the spouse is a roommate, tasks get done or don't. There isn't enough focus.

We usually identify with our external situations: our jobs, relationships, interests, bodies, and so on. This is identifying with the contents of space, the experience rather than the experiencer. Of course, then, when we lose some of these things, we feel lost. The relationship ends, the job ends, we move to a new place, and we say we're lost. We're in-between things and we don't quite know who or what we are.

If we fully integrate with the space element, we know the nature of mind. Then we are free because we are no longer bound by what arises in experience. We realize our true nature and do not try to find ourselves in the particulars of our situation. We are connected to the essence and don't look outside to find the cause of our problems. We know any problem we are experiencing is simply something arising in space; we don't have to become the problem. We can support ourselves through the experience of being rather than through how others see us or what we have or what we do. There is more acceptance of ourselves and of what we encounter.

For example, a man who has a beautiful family and a successful business, and who identifies himself with both, can lose both. Then he can lose himself or open himself, depending on his relationship to space. A painful situation can result in a negative or a positive outcome, depending on the response. With the loss of external definition, identity can become either constricted, fearful, and fragile or it can expand outside of its normal confines by identifying with the space in which experience arises.

In meditation practice, unbalanced space results in a lack of focus and presence. The mind is easily distracted by whatever arises in it because one identifies with experience rather than the basis of experience. Dzogchen is the main practice for developing the space element, but space is also realized as the other four elements are brought into increasing balance. The wisdom of emptiness is related to space.

THE ELEMENTS AND OUR WELL-BEING

The ideal physical environment for humans is a land where the earth is fertile and healthy, the water plentiful and pure, the air clean and fresh, and the temperature moderate. There should be enough space for our farms, animals, cities, and projects. In other words, it should be an environment where the elements are ideally balanced for our human needs. Of course we can live in a range of environments, from the freezing, arid plateaus of Tibet to deserts, swamps, rain forests, and arctic wilds. The harsher climates require more from us, more energy and struggle, than does the ideal environment.

Similarly, the quality of our lives is best when the internal elements are balanced, but we can survive—and do—in unbalanced states. The biological functions of our bodies are considered normal in a certain range: blood pressure should be between here and there; hormone levels between this and that. As the functions move out of the optimum range, negative effects increase. When the imbalance is great enough, the body is damaged or dies. This is true in our other dimensions, too. Emotions are considered normal within less clearly defined ranges. Nearly everyone has periods of depression, but they are not considered a problem unless they are very serious or chronic. Fear is a normal experience in frightening situations, but constant fear and anxiety is considered abnormal and debilitating. The point is not to get rid of our emotions, but to balance them. For example, beings in the realms of the gods are understood not to be beyond emotion, but to live with their internal forces in such balance that they are consistently blissful.

We can be successful, have good relationships, and enjoy our lives, but if we're unbalanced, we'll never feel exactly right. Conversely, when the elements are balanced, we can live in difficult situations, with little material wealth, with few friends and so on, and remain stable, centered, and flexible. We may not like the situation we're in, but we'll be comfortable in ourselves.

Study of and practice with the elements is meant to positively affect our well-being by giving us the tools to bring the elements into the balance that underlies health and wholeness in any dimension of experience. It does not take great intuition to know when we are in or out of balance. We all know these experiences. They fall along a continuum from the most disturbed imbalance—psychosis or serious illness—to perfect balance, which occurs only when we can abide in the nature of mind, the buddha-nature. In our daily lives we are somewhere in between, moving from being more in balance to being more out of balance, and back again.

The idea of balancing elemental energies can be usefully applied to any

human function, quality, or activity: health, relationship, spiritual practice, psychological make-up, emotional state, physical environment, and so on. Using imbalance of the elements as a primary metaphor, we can understand illness and unhappiness as well as obstructions on all levels of spiritual practice. Balancing the elements then becomes a metaphor for healing, for the development of positive qualities and capacities, and for the elimination of negative qualities. If one element dominates, we need to cultivate its opposite. If we are dominated by fire, for example, then we try to activate water or earth, and vice versa. If earth is dominant—we are dull, sleepy, heavy—then we activate air or fire. And if air dominates us—we are flighty, nervous, with a short attention span—then we activate earth or water. There are many obvious examples of balancing in everyday life: if a fever becomes life-threatening, we may be told to soak in cold water; if we become too cold, we apply warmth; and if we're dehydrated, we drink water.

By nature, all conceptualizations are symbolic and the five elements are symbols of great depth and long tradition. Beyond metaphor, however, the five elements are energies that can be worked with directly by the practitioner through physical actions, energetic movement, and the flow of awareness.

HOW THE ELEMENTS BECOME UNBALANCED

Each of us begins life as a unique manifestation of the elements. We carry very specific karmic determinants that make one individual distinct from another. If we were perfectly balanced at birth, we would be born as fully realized buddhas. However we are born as ordinary beings, which means the elements are imbalanced to some extent. If the imbalance at birth is great, it may be obvious. For example, on the gross physical level, being born with a metabolic problem that makes it impossible to digest food properly is quickly recognized. We would call this a lack of fire. Even small differences in the strengths and combinations of elemental energies create the different characteristics of the individual, the variations in temperament and mental faculties as well as the physical differences.

After birth, the environment and the individual's responses to the environment further affect the dynamics of the elements. Accidents and crises—the situations that evoke a strong reaction or a shutting down—have consequences, as do even the smallest decisions and gestures.

Each action that we take, on any level, is an expression of the elemental qualities in some combination or interplay, and a reinforcement of the conditions that generated it. Anger, for an easy example, is usually a fiery re-

sponse. If we habitually react with anger, we cultivate the fire in ourselves, though in this instance it's a negative attribute of fire. In the same way, because creativity is connected to the luminous fire nature, when we respond creatively we are also developing the fire element in ourselves, in this case its positive aspects. Over time our habitual actions and reactions favor the development of certain elements and often leave others less cultivated or weaker. This process is further strengthened by cultural norms that favor some elemental qualities over others. To continue with the fire example, growing up in a social group that favors aggressive, fiery reactions, we will tend to develop those qualities to the detriment of softer, more watery responses to the world.

Elemental imbalance can be either temporary or life-long. For example, a person may be easy with other people and confident in general but be extremely anxious in a particular situation such as public speaking or taking a test. A chronically shy individual can sometimes become outgoing and self-confident after drinking alcohol. A happy person can become depressed after the loss of a relationship. A person of great faith can become insecure and nihilistic when faced with the death of a loved one. These are all temporary shifts in elemental balance due to external events.

Such shifts happen from moment to moment. After a heavy lunch we become drowsy and dominated by earth. If we are called in to talk to the boss, we may lose our connection to earth and become dominated by air and worry. An exhausting meeting when we're tired may result in a loss of the creativity of fire—which later can be stimulated in a good conversation with friends.

Almost anything can imbalance the elements: diet, thoughts, emotions, movies, friends, culture, illness, and so forth. But that does not make our situation as fragile as it sounds. We can also balance the elements through diet, thoughts, emotions, movies, and so on. For example, if we are too airy, something as simple as spending time with grounded, earthy friends can help us.

Certain imbalances can be more fixed, such as long-standing character traits or habitual tendencies that tend to keep reinforcing themselves. The way we speak, the colors we like, and the way we walk and move our hands are expressions of the elements and in all these we can, if we know what we are looking at, see which element or elements dominate us. In the West, people tend to think about such things in psychological terms, but the interactions of the elements are more basic than the level of psychological manifestation.

Some people can be relatively balanced naturally. They may have enough space, enough comfort, groundedness, creativity, and flexibility. The higher

qualities may be present: compassion, love, generosity, patience, and so on. And the physical being may be equally balanced. We've all met people like this. They tend to be healthy and happy, capable and confident. They work on the situations of their lives and make them supportive: their jobs and relationships are good.

But then one of life's inevitable tragedies occurs. They fall ill or a loved one dies. They may be cheated in business or have a car accident. Perhaps there is a natural recovery or perhaps the balance is lost. We hear these stories all the time: the man who doesn't recover from the loss of his wife, the woman who can't cope with her cancer. Everything is turned upside down. The meaning of life becomes questionable and elusive. Faith wavers or is lost. The elements have gone out of balance. Perhaps the stability is gone, or the joy, or the creativity. Such people come to be dominated by one element—angry all the time or depressed or distracted or spaced-out or sad.

People can stay lost for the remainder of their lives or can begin to try to address the disharmony. They may go to a doctor or change their diets or start exercise plans or go to therapists. Religious affiliation may be renewed or begun. If they have not already intentionally started the spiritual journey, beginning in response to suffering is the best response.

In all of these different attempts at healing, something is either cultivated or eliminated. Stop eating this, start eating that; stop thinking that way, think this way; let go of sedentary habits, start new activity habits. When something feels wrong in our lives, we want something to change; we want to have more of something that we feel is lacking, or get rid of something that we feel is disturbing.

There is a natural impulse in us toward balance just as there is a natural pull toward increased awareness and spiritual growth. Both can be perverted or denied, but the wisdom that can lead us toward balance is inherent in our being.

THE ARISING OF PROBLEMS

A disturbance in life can show up in any dimension of experience. It can be physical, such as a disease manifested in the body. A doctor may be consulted, x-rays made, blood tests performed. The disease is named. It has a form: it is a bacteria or virus or cancer—something substantial. And the disease is treated with something substantial: a pill or injection, a chemical or herb. Or the problem may be primarily mental. It's a problem in the mind, though the health of the body may suffer. Then, perhaps, the person goes to a psychotherapist, tries to understand the problem intellectually, tries to under-

stand the emotions, tries to find the meaning in what is occurring, or tries to change the way he or she is thinking about the situation or him- or herself.

Tibetan culture also recognizes a third area in which problems manifest: the energetic dimension. Traditionally the disturbances here are those that cannot be medically diagnosed. They are believed to be the result of negative interference by non-physical beings. Then the diagnosis must be made through less substantial means such as inquiry, divination, intuition, dreams, or astrology. The treatment methods are also insubstantial: exorcism through contact with sacred texts and other objects, purification through smoke and water, soul retrieval and life-force enhancement through rituals, yogic exercise of the prana, meditation practices, contemplation, and prayers.

When we have a problem, it's important to find the appropriate tools and methods to work with it. Even better is to find the solution to all problems, which is to recognize the nature of mind and to abide in it. But if we don't know the nature of the mind or can't abide in it, then we need to know other practices to do. If we apply the wrong practice to a situation, it will not be effective. If we have energetic problems, intellectual analysis is unlikely to help. On the other hand, if we have a wrong intellectual view or a wrong attitude, burning incense and waving feathers probably won't do much.

In the previous discussion of the five pure lights, the process through which the insubstantial is experienced as substantial through mistaken dualistic vision was described. When we understand this process, we also understand how problems, obstacles, and disturbances arise. They begin in the subtle levels and move toward more substantial manifestations. A disease for example, may show up in dreams before being felt physically. Then it may manifest as an energetic change, fatigue, or restlessness. Finally it will reveal itself as noticeable symptoms in the physical body.

If the problem is recognized on a subtler level, let's say in a dream, it may be resolved through subtle means: a ritual, practices done in a lucid dream, prayers, or directing energies in the body. But if the disease does not enter awareness until it manifests physically, then physical medicine or surgery may be required, or it may be beyond stopping and death results.

Similarly a disturbance between friends, if noticed in a dream or daydream or picked up as a sensation in the body when the friends are together, can often be healed with only a change of heart.

But as it moves into increasingly substantial manifestation, it requires more work, more talking, more process, and more effort to correct.

Conceptually dividing experience into levels or dimensions allows us to work more skillfully with particular situations in our lives, but of course experience is really seamless and all-at-once. Because the division of expe-

rience into different dimensions is only conceptual, causes, results, and antidotes have effects on all levels. Even in diseases that are well advanced physically, subtle treatment like rituals may be of benefit. For example, science has documented many cases of strong faith resulting in the spontaneous remission of advanced disease processes even though this is baffling in a materialistic world view. Similarly, grosser forms of treatment can effect subtle levels, as when the seeds of a disease are positively affected or negated by physical yogas or medicines.

In a certain sense, problems do not only start on the subtle level and move to the grosser—they can also apparently start on the more substantial levels and affect the subtle. Physical trauma often results in emotional problems. Accidents and disease can confuse the mind and mood. However, in the Tibetan view, even these apparently accidental or external causes of imbalance are thought to begin as insubstantial karmic traces that finally manifest on the external level.

PURIFICATION AND CULTIVATION

There are tools to interrupt or transform negative aspects of experience moving toward manifestation. Purification practices can be effective. On the physical level such practices can include dietary restrictions, austerities, and rules of behavior. On the emotional level certain attitudes and negative emotions are renounced. In tantra there are many visualizations practices that purify oneself, other beings, and all existence.

We can also cultivate positive aspects of experience. No one had to train us to cultivate negative qualities: when we have a problem, we ruminate on it endlessly. Instead, we can train ourselves to think positive thoughts. When we catch ourselves in the middle of angry fantasies, we can generate compassionate ones. We can cultivate love and joy, creativity and stability, the positive qualities of the pure elements.

For example, in the sutric teachings of both Bön and Buddhism there is the teaching of the cultivation of the four immeasurables: love, compassion, joy, and equanimity. These four qualities are considered particularly supportive of the spiritual path. If we are trying to cultivate joy, for example, we first find the experience of joy in ourselves. In those times when we are naturally feeling joy—perhaps when we are with people we love, or in natural beauty, or listening to music—we can bring that experience into awareness. The joy is not dependent on those things, it is a capacity that we have that is activated when it meets an external object or situation that supports it.

When we know what joy feels like, we can clear a space in experience

—which is purification—and then feel joy directly. Once we know the experience, we cultivate it by supporting it. When we wake in the morning, we can start the day by thinking about our great fortune in being human, having enough to eat, living in freedom, and having encountered the spiritual path. We can recite a mantra connected to the experience of joy, offer prayers, wear something that reminds us to cultivate joy. We can cultivate fire and water, both connected to joy.

We can cultivate any quality in this way: love, compassion, courage, stability, comfort in ourselves, gratitude, and so on. What we connect with externally can support our internal experiences. Look to see what is in the center of your life. What do you surround yourself with, what books are on your shelves, what images on your walls, what certificates of accomplishment do you keep around?

Thinking in terms of purification and cultivation is one of the many ways we can help balance the elements.

KNOWING WHICH ELEMENT TO WORK WITH

The practices in this book are helpful for anyone who seriously practices them whether or not there is an understanding of the elements. But with such an understanding comes the ability to determine what is lacking or dominating and how to bring about an increasing balance.

The previous descriptions of the elements should provide enough information and direction for you to start observing elemental traits. With continued observation, intuition will begin to use the idea of the elements as a tool for understanding experience and a new way of looking into ourselves and our lives will arise. My concern in this book is not with the intricate kinds of diagnoses of elemental imbalances that are found in Tibetan and Chinese medical systems, but with a general understanding that will help individuals on the spiritual path.

One way to think about long-term imbalance is to think about what you've wanted to change about yourself and how you act and react in life. This inquiry usually leads to particular traits or capacities you want to develop or diminish. What do you want to change in how you feel physically, emotionally, energetically, mentally? Where do you run into problems? Are you always late? Do you talk too much? Too little? Are you generally alert or dull? Agitated or calm? Are you creative? Comfortable in yourself? Are you grounded? Do you worry too much? Are you responsible? Are you accomplishing what you want? How is your meditation practice? Is there progress or do you simply spend time in a trance every day? Is your medi-

tation the same as it was years ago or has there been progress? Do you have more insight? Is your mind quieter and calmer? Are you more peaceful? Is your practice joyful or is it a burden?

The answers to these questions can be translated into elemental terms. For each area that you would like to change, think of the elemental quality that needs to be cultivated or diminished. You will most likely, but not necessarily, come up with one or two elements that seem to dominate your experience or one or two elements that seem lacking.

Another way to find out about your dominant traits is to ask your friends what element they think dominates you. Even if they don't know anything about the elements, you might find that you get surprisingly consistent responses.

The important thing is to understand yourself. Bring your intelligence to bear on the questions of your own life and apply your insights to improving the quality of your life and the effectiveness of your spiritual practice. You can change even very ingrained habitual tendencies, but you must apply your understanding and effort, and you must do so intelligently. Life is too short to waste doing inappropriate or ineffective spiritual practices, and too short not to engage in appropriate and effective spiritual practices.

Choose the appropriate practices described later in this book. If you are too scattered, develop strength of mind by developing earth. If you are too dull, develop air with the practices focusing on prana. If you worry too much, diminish the air quality, and cultivate earth and water. If you are too angry, diminish fire and cultivate water. If you are irresponsible, diminish water or space and cultivate earth and fire. And so on.

Understanding how to work with the elements also provides tools to use in situations in which you are unbalanced. If you become nervous when meeting strangers, develop your connection to earth so that you can call on it and change your experience in the moment. Connect to earth, ground yourself. On the other hand, if you are dull when with other people, develop your ability to connect to the qualities of fire and air, and call on those when needed.

This kind of work develops the quality of life, and that is good. More importantly, it is a tool to support spiritual practice. When you sit to meditate, if you are dull, connect to the pervasive qualities of air, to the inspiration of fire. If you are scattered, ground through the earth element. If you are agitated, connect to the comfort of water, and so on.

WORKING WITH THE ELEMENTS

The practices I give here come from the ancient traditions of Bön and are found in texts that are centuries old, such as the Mother Tantra. They are

spiritual practices. They are not medical practices that work with inert substances and disease entities; they are not psychological practices meant to work through our emotional habits; they are not cognitive practices used to trick the mind into healing. Though they contribute to physical health, emotional stability, and cognitive clarity, they most importantly work with the sacred energies of existence. Through them the practitioner is related to the sacred and is sanctified. In order for the practices to be effective at this level, the practitioner must understand that what is being dealt with is alive and divine.

The understanding that the elements are the abode of innumerable living beings, including divine goddesses and powerful semi-divine beings, is part of the strength of shamanistic practices. Our well-being is enhanced when we learn to value the inner life of ourselves and of nature.

Tantra works with the principle that the macrocosm and microcosm reflect each other. In terms of the tantric practices presented in this book, this means that the energies that are manipulated in the body are the same sacred energies from which all creation arises. To treat these energies as "my" fire or "my" water energy misses an important purpose of the practices—to relate ourselves to the sacred and to become sacred through that relationship. Psychologizing the practices makes the elements simply conceptual abstractions used to manipulate our own personal psychologies and bodies rather than to dissolve our limited identities in the sacred essence of all that is.

Although the three levels of practice work with different dimensions of experience, in the life of the practitioner they usually intertwine. Some tantric practitioners perform shamanistic rituals and practice Dzogchen, and Dzogchen students practice tantra and make offerings to the guardians. It is harder for the practitioners of lower practices to incorporate higher practices, but it should be no problem for those who work with higher practices to incorporate the lower. In any case, it is helpful to separate these levels for the purposes of learning, so that the differences are understood and so that the practitioner is not confused about the view, the methods, and the goals in each level of practice.

All of the levels work with symbols and concepts connected to the elemental energies because symbols are how we relate to energetic processes. Imagine that in a dream you are bitten by a poisonous animal. Symbolically that can mean a lot of things and the individual who has the dream is in the best position to know what the meaning is. But let's say that in general it means there is something negative, poisonous, in you or threatening you. The shamanistic practitioner might do a ritual invoking the spirits that have injected the poison into the dreamer, and then make offerings to those spirits

or use ritual to overpower them in order to have the poison removed. The tantric practitioner, too, may use rituals, but he or she may also work directly with the energies of the body through yogic practices of the prana and channels or work with the *yidam* in deity yoga. Alternatively, the tantric practitioner may see all phenomena as illusory and not be bothered by such a dream. The accomplished Dzogchen practitioner, abiding in non-dual awareness, will not be concerned with the meaning of the dream. He or she is no longer interpreting experience. But most Dzogchen practitioners are not so firmly established in the nature of mind and they, too, must deal with relative situations and their consequences. Traditionally they use either shamanistic or tantric practices to address this kind of situation.

CHOOSING THE LEVEL OF THE PRACTICE

Whether or not meditation and spiritual practices are powerful depends on the practitioner more than the form of the practice. There is little benefit if they are done without a correct understanding of how to practice and what the practice is supposed to accomplish. The practitioner can engage in a fantasy of spiritual progress but genuine spiritual development may be lacking. For example, when we are weak, energetically disturbed, depressed, or holding tightly to a fragile identity, we are easier prey to negative external influences and to internal confusions. At such a time, believing ourselves to be practicing a very high practice like Dzogchen may not be very helpful. If we claim to be practicing a high practice but there is no positive effect, we are only deceiving ourselves. The highest practice for an individual is the practice that is most effective, whatever it is called.

No one can really tell you which practice you should do at a particular time. You must come to understand the practices, how they are meant to work and within what situations, and then be relentlessly honest with yourself about your own present capacity. Be clear with yourself. Don't idealize. Find the right teacher. Study. And then make a decision. It's not a question of which practice is better in an abstract sense, it's a question of which practice you need. If you are dishonest with yourself or do not investigate the practices that you do, you may lose many years, even a lifetime, doing practices with little or no result.

In the West everyone wants the "highest" practice, a wish that indicates a misunderstanding of the path. Everyone wants to hurry through the foundational practices (*ngön dro*). But great masters do these practices all their lives. They continue to contemplate impermanence, cultivate compassion, do purification practices, make offerings, and do Guru Yoga. It is not a

stage to get over. The most accomplished masters and teachers do these practices and cultivate these qualities all the way to the highest stages of realization, because there is still benefit in doing them.

The ground of individual existence is empty awareness. This may not sound very inviting. Emptiness is usually considered to be undesirable: an empty feeling or an empty life or an empty head or an empty heart are considered negative. So we've been filling this emptiness since time without beginning. We make up identities and things and stories, but because we are mistaken about what all these really are, they never quite satisfy.

Shamanic practice is creating order in what fills the space, learning to exercise power over what arises and what may interfere with us, and learning to find support in the environment. The shaman does not care so much about abstract philosophy. He or she instead learns how to connect to, manipulate, and defend against forces.

Sutric practice is based on renunciation, on getting tired of much of what has been accumulated in space. Practitioners try to throw out the negative, get rid of the self-centeredness that's caused them so much pain. And they try to finish with the greed, anger, and delusion that's kept them in misery for so long and just keep the love, compassion, faith, equanimity, peace, and wisdom.

The tantric practitioner doesn't throw anything out. Instead, he or she takes what is at hand and turns it into beauty, into sacred ornaments that adorn the empty space. Ordinary deluded beings are transformed into buddhas. Sounds are transformed into sacred mantras. Sensation turns to bliss. The practitioner trades in a small, confined, scared, unhappy, anxious identity for an expansive, unlimited, grounded, joyful, peaceful identity.

The Great Perfection practitioner lives in pure empty space, and appreciates it. He or she lets go of everything, even the sense of self, and it all dissolves into the limitless base, the kunzhi, from which all phenomena arise as pure light and pure experience. Everything is empty and emptiness is enough. It's very spacious and luminous.

So which practice should you do? The one that seems appropriate in the moment. The one you've connected with, understood, practiced, applied. If you cannot resolve everything with one practice, then use other practices. Experiment with the practices in this book until you know how to work with them and know how they affect you, and realize that the longer you work with any practice the more profound its effects will be. Learn what works and what you need. The spiritual path isn't a passive journey; you don't just follow what someone says. You have to investigate, inquire, ex-

periment. You have to invest yourself, your time, and your life in the path. Then you will find that the path reveals itself to you. You can follow it, but in following it you must also discover it.

TWO

THE FIVE ELEMENTS IN SHAMANISM

Many Westerners talk about Tibetan shamanism but, as I mentioned earlier, there is no such term in Tibetan. Instead, the Bön tradition talks about the "causal vehicles," the first four of the nine levels of Bön teachings in the Southern Treasure tradition. These four collections of teachings and practices are called: Chashen (The Way of the Shen of Prediction), Nangshen (The Way of the Shen of the Visible World), Trulshen (The Way of the Shen of Magical Illusion), and Srishen (The Way of the Shen of Existence).

Chashen, the first way, teaches the practices of medical diagnosis, healing, divination, the astrology of prediction, and the astrology of diagnosis. The second way, Nangshen, includes teachings and practices related to purification rituals, rituals to summon energy and to enhance prosperity and well-being, rituals to suppress or liberate negative forces and to invoke and make offerings to deities, and rituals to free those possessed or attacked by demonic spirits. Practitioners of the third way, Trulshen, travel to wild places and perform practices to subjugate demons and spirits that live there. The conquered spirits are bound by vows to protect the spiritual teachings and the practitioners of the teachings. Srishen, the fourth way, works with the spirits of the living and the dead. For the living, rituals are performed to recover lost or damaged life force or soul qualities, as will be explained in greater detail below. For the dead, rites are performed to free them from negative influences and to guide and support them through experiences they have between this life and the next.

I use the word shamanic to refer to practices meant to harmonize the relationship between the individual and the environment through working with non-physical beings and the sacred energies underlying nature. Gener-

ally, shamanism deals with forces and entities understood as being external to the practitioner. Practitioners work with the raw natural elements and their energy, and they also work with spirits, deities, healing goddesses, ancestral spirits, and other non-physical beings.

The shamanic vehicles are not primarily concerned with enlightenment but with the removal of obstacles in life, the enhancement of positive qualities, and the lessening of the suffering we experience through interaction with external forces. They are known as the "causal vehicles" because they create the causes and foundations for participation in the "resultant vehicles"—sutra, tantra and Dzogchen.

In Western countries there sometimes seems to be a division between students interested in shamanism and those interested in Great Perfection and other non-dual teachings. There may be a number of reasons this is so. Some people are sensitive to non-physical entities and forces and naturally feel an affinity for teachings that address experiences with which they are already familiar. On the other hand, some Westerners, educated in the materialism of secular Western culture, assume these teachings are only superstition, something they must go through in order to reach the higher teachings in which they are interested.

However, shamanic practices can help tantric and Dzogchen practitioners remove or heal the causes of much suffering and remove or overcome obstructions to spiritual practice. For example, I know a very scholarly monk concerned almost exclusively with philosophy and academic studies. When he was ill, he went to his kitchen and prepared an offering to the spirits he thought were responsible for causing the illness. This is natural in Tibetan culture; for us there is no conflict between the philosophical, the spiritual, and the shamanic, and shamanic practices are incorporated into the other levels of teachings. I think this blending of shamanism with the higher views of sutra, tantra, and Dzogchen may be unique to Tibetan culture.

In Bön, the shamanic practitioner works mostly with external symbols and with symbolic acts of ritual. The symbol connects the focused mind of the practitioner with the aspect of experience the symbol represents, whether a force or an entity. For instance, when a food offering is made to spirits or deities, it is often placed outside. Eventually birds, insects, or animals eat it. This doesn't negate the offering. On the energetic level, the symbols and symbolic actions have made a connection: something has been offered from the human side and something has been received on the spirit side. Energy is manipulated through symbols, and the forces and beings affected will be known to the practitioner with the capacity to perceive them.

If an illness begins to manifest or if negative emotions begin to dominate experience, a shamanic practitioner might perform a ritual that includes working with spirits thought to cause the disease or be capable of influencing its course. Herbs particularly associated with elemental energies may be taken internally, steeped as tea, or burned so that the smoke may be inhaled. Energies may be collected shamanically from their raw manifestations: earth energy from a mountain or earth spirit, for example, or the energy of fire directly from sources of heat or from fire spirits. A shamanic healer uses many such methods to benefit others who are suffering from physical, emotional, or mental discomfort or illness.

Because all things are interrelated, one can read signs and portents. Omens are meaningful not because they have been arranged for an individual by larger forces, but because everything influences everything else. Thus, for someone with the proper sensitivity, the world becomes a book in which all meaning can be read. Dreams can be read, as can cards, thrown stones, cloud formations, the sounds of water, the conditions of the weather, and the movements of animals. Spirits communicate through signs and symbols encountered in daily life. In the shamanic consciousness there are no meaningless coincidences; everything has meaning and the skilled practitioner can draw out particular meanings from the infinitely complex relationships that connect all things and beings.

Awareness of signs and portents is found in every culture. However the use of signs often becomes mere superstition when the connection to the original meaning is lost. For example, in the United States it is considered inauspicious for a black cat to cross one's path. Though this kind of thing is mostly joked about, many people still feel uneasy when they walk under a leaning ladder. Other cultures believe that it is inauspicious when a snake crosses the path in a downward direction or when an owl is heard laughing in the early morning. Perhaps individuals in most cultures would consider a dream of the sun falling to the earth, of a loss of light, to be negative, whereas dreams of sunrise or blooming flowers are considered auspicious.

In Tibetan culture, when an inauspicious sign is encountered, there are remedies meant to protect the positive qualities that are threatened or to retrieve them when they are lost. For example, when a negative omen is seen, people might imagine their right and left hands as the sun and moon discs. They imagine the solar and lunar powers and energies, visualize this with the mind, try to feel the energy of it in the body, and then clap their hands together. They say, "For what threatened me in the bad dream"—clap! Or, "I disperse the negative forces represented by these symbols (the

signs or dreams)"—clap! The loud clap is meant to drive away the negative forces.

I think this process is similar to what Catholics do when they make the sign of the cross upon encountering something negative or frightening. Other cultures have their own symbols and actions. Even people who believe all this to be groundless superstition feel something when encountering certain signs or a series of negative images or events. There is a discomfort, things feel out of order, or there is a feeling of negative oppression. In secular cultures the discomfort may be blamed on a bad dinner or the first signs of illness—something acceptable. But doing this doesn't offer much in the way of a response to the situation. The shamanic practices provide tools that can energetically balance a situation and restore harmony to the relationship between the individual and the environment.

LA, YEE, AND SEM

In the shamanic vehicles there are various ways to think about health and well being, all based on an understanding of the elements. As I stated earlier, the more balanced the elements, the greater the health, and the less balanced, the worse the health. This is true on every level: physical, emotional, psychological, energetic, and spiritual. Some texts write of this in terms of the *la (bla), yee (yid),* and *sem (sems)*. There are no exact translations into English of these terms. Also, these words may have different meanings depending on the level of the teachings. In Dzogchen texts, for instance, sem (or mind) includes what in the causal vehicles is separated into sem and yee. Please note that terms here relate to the shamanic vehicles and that the same terms are explained differently in different contexts.

La is usually translated as "soul" but, more accurately, the la is the depth of who we are. On the deepest level, it is the balance of the five pure lights, the pure elemental energies. On the level of ordinary life, the la is the capacity to experience the five elemental qualities: groundedness, comfort, inspiration, flexibility, and accommodation.

The la is associated with the karmic traces that make us human rather than something else, such as a turtle or a god. Our la is a human la. The la of a tiger is a tiger la. The la determines which kind of being we will be as well as much of our individual identity and capacity.

The la underlies our vitality, our inner strength as an individual. It can be damaged or enhanced, stolen and retrieved. If we are humiliated, it is weakened. If we succeed in what is important to us, it is strengthened. If we act with integrity it is made stronger. If we betray ourselves, it loses vigor.

I often translate la as "basic human goodness" because the la is the basis of our capacity for positive qualities. We are born with the capacity to trust our mothers, to develop love and connection, to be kind. This is basic human goodness: basic love, basic trust, basic connection, and so on. Basic human goodness can be developed through moral, spiritual, and religious traditions and guidance, but it is innate. As it is developed, the la becomes stronger and can be healed if need be.

We will always encounter conditions and events that disturb the la: family problems, political oppression, illness, accidents. Non-physical entities can also negatively affect us. Whatever the source, if the la is hurt–by any of these things–and there isn't enough strength to overcome that hurt, basic human goodness can be damaged. The capacities to trust, love, give, and receive can be constricted. That's how damage to the la manifests psychologically. It can also manifest physically and energetically. The positive aspects of the elemental qualities can be lost.

In Tibetan astrology it is said that la is the mother of the life-force; if the la is damaged, the life-force is diminished. Damage to the la can occur slowly, over a long period of time, or all at once. After an accident, for example, there can be long-lasting damage: fear that won't subside, a negative change in perspective, and so on. We call this kind of damage or disturbance in the basic human goodness "soul loss."

While the la determines the qualities and capacities of the individual, the yee is the movement of experience shaped by the la. The la is the capacity to feel joy or sadness, trust or mistrust; the yee is what actually feels joy or sadness, trust or mistrust. The yee is the reflective aspect of the mind in which the capacities and qualities contained in the la arise in experience.

The sem is the active, conceptual mind. It has the capacity to understand, judge, know, and decide. How well it does this is affected by the condition of the la and the yee.

The condition of the la manifests as the capacities and qualities of the individual's mind. When the la is balanced, the images and thoughts that manifest in the mind are similarly healthy and balanced. When the la is damaged, the thoughts and images in the mind are correspondingly negative and unhealthy.

The three—la, yee, and sem—cannot be separated. They must be considered together in shamanic practice because the health of one is dependent on the health of all three, and the health of all three is related to the balance of the elements.

LA, SOK, AND TSE

Another threefold set of terms is also used in the causal vehicles to talk about the health of the individual: la, *sok (srog),* and *tse (tshe)*. The la I have already explained as the karmic capacity for basic positive human qualities. Tse (or life-span) is the potential length of our life. We think about this as something that can be damaged or enhanced. Sok, the life-force, is vitality and is closely related to the innate awareness, *rigpa*. Like rigpa, the life-force is boundless and without identity, rather than personal. Unlike rigpa, we can lose life-force or accumulate it. When we feel aversion to experience, our life-force is lessened. When we see beauty, in even the worst situation, our life-force is enhanced. Relative beauty can enliven the intellect and open us somewhat, but seeing the beauty of the purity of being feeds the life-force on a deeper level.

Sincere prayer, a pure emotional expression, increases life-force. Sensual experiences of color and the beauty of nature as well as appreciation of experience feed the life-force. If you don't currently feel an appreciation of life, use your mind to generate it: "This is a nice hotel, a beautiful tree, a good person," and so on. Life-force can be retrieved from any dimension by opening, accepting, and appreciating. People with partners they love, even with pets they love, live longer and heal faster than people alone. Where there is love there is connection and appreciation. Through connection the energy of the earth element is strengthened and it strengthens the life-force.

Because the relationship with nature—the raw elements and the beauty of the natural world–is so important, it's good to make it a practice to bring mindful appreciation to the earth, air, sky, heat, and water. Positively connecting to spirits associated with the elements can also enhance the life-force.

PRACTICES

The shamanic vehicles contain a large number of practices that include meditations, visualizations, mantras, and prayers. There are numerous rituals of ransom, soul retrieval, cultivation of life-force, longevity, healing, purification, invocation, and protection. Some practices are very simple, some are very complex. Here I focus on only two practices. The first involves working with the raw natural elements for support and healing. The second is a practice that calls upon the five elemental goddesses to aid us in retrieving lost or damaged energies. In Tibetan it is called "retrieving the elemental essences" (*'byung ba'i bcud 'dus*). I have also included information on making offerings.



The Element Goddess: Dekche Drolma

WORKING WITH THE ELEMENTS IN NATURE

Working with the raw natural elements is a process of connecting with the external elements and internalizing their qualities. Doing this ultimately leads to connection with the essence of the elements which, in the shamanic path, is considered part of the soul. At this level, connecting is healing. The internalization of elemental energies helps us to cultivate positive qualities and eliminate negative ones.

We are affected when we go where the land is in its natural state: deserts, mountains, jungles, and open plains. What affects us is not only the physical beauty that we see with our eyes. Rather, the whole body responds. These deeper responses are often unconscious, but with practice we can learn to internalize the energies of the natural elements for healing and regeneration. Even when we are not in the wilds of nature we are always in contact with the elements. Therefore these practices are always available.

When we take a hot bath or shower and feel the relaxation and comfort of the warm water, we can bring the comfort inside and feel it throughout our bodies. We can imagine bringing in the qualities with our breath. Then we can feel it in the more subtle dimensions of our experience, such as in the central channel and the heart center. We can let the comfort of water pervade us and the space around us and eventually all other beings and all places. Absorbing positive qualities and then radiating them to all beings is a practice that is common in tantra.

This pattern is used again and again in practice with the elements. We can practice with everyday experiences—the warmth of the sun, for example. When you feel the warmth of the sun on your skin, relax and take it in to the deepest parts of yourself. Use your imagination. Feel the warmth stream through the channels of your body and into the central channel. Then feel it collect in the center of the central channel, the region of your heart. Let it in even deeper, into your soul. Immerse yourself in that, feeling the warmth of your body, channels, *chakras*, central channel, heart, and soul. Let the sunlight be the external phenomena that evokes the healing qualities of the fire element, which are always in you. The most essential level of the sun's energy is the most subtle level of fire and as you develop your practice you can use imagination and visualization to bring this energy into the most intimate dimensions of your being.

Ultimately we can merge with the element. We connect the external quality with the internal quality and then dissolve the distinctions. Reaching out is reaching in when we have developed practices that connect the two. Otherwise, reaching out is just reaching out and going away from ourselves.

In order to do the practice described below it is helpful to go to an area where the natural elements are strong. A good time to practice is when you are staying at the beach, walking in the mountains, sitting in the sun or in front of a fire, standing on the ridge of a hill, feeling the wind blow—or anytime you become aware of the presence of one or more of the elements. Connecting with awareness to strong manifestations of the elements in nature supports the development of those elements internally.

There are traditional signs of success in this practice as in all the practices with the elements, but the most important sign is the appearance of positive changes in a life. What was internally weak becomes stronger, while negative qualities that once dominated experience begin to diminish. Watch for these changes to gauge the extent to which you are integrating your everyday life with the practices.

The practice is most effective when time, attitude, form of the element, mantra, sacred images, and imagination are used together harmoniously. Try to remain focused on the experience of the practice, keeping the awareness fresh and clear. Sessions can be of any length, but try to do them for at least a half hour or forty-five minutes to develop a stronger experience. You can be alone or with another person. Before beginning any practice, including this one, it is helpful to purify and open the channels of the body using the practice of the Nine Purification Breaths.

The Nine Purification Breaths

The Nine Purification Breaths is a short practice designed to open and clear the channels and relax the mind and body. It is good to do before any meditation practice and can also be done in the morning upon waking and in the evening prior to sleep.

Sit in a cross-legged meditation posture. Place your hands palm up in your lap, with the left hand resting on the right. Tuck your chin under just a little to straighten the back of the neck. Keep the back straight but not rigid, the chest open. The eyes can be closed or open.

Visualize the three primary channels. The central channel begins in the center of the body, four finger-widths below the navel. It rises straight up the center of the body. It is the size of a thick fountain pen and widens slightly from the heart to its opening at the crown of the head. The side channels are the diameter of pencils and join the central channel at its base below the navel. They rise straight through the body on either side of the central channel, curve under the skull, pass down behind the eyes, and open at the nostrils. In women the right channel is red and the left is white. In

men the right channel is white and the left is red. The central channel is blue in both men and women.

First Three Breaths

Men: Raise the right hand with the thumb pressing the base of the ring finger. Closing the right nostril with the ring finger, inhale green light through the left nostril. Then, closing the left nostril with the right ring finger, exhale completely through the right nostril. Repeat this for three inhalations and exhalations.

Women: Raise the left hand with the thumb pressing the base of the ring finger. Closing the left nostril with the left ring finger, inhale green light through the right nostril. Then, closing the right nostril with the left ring finger, exhale completely through the left nostril. Repeat this for three inhalations and exhalations.

With each exhalation, imagine all obstacles linked with male potencies expelled from the white channel in the form of light blue air. These include illnesses associated with the winds as well as obstacles and obscurations connected with the past.

Second Three Breaths

Men and Women: Change hands and nostrils and repeat for three inhalations and exhalations. With each exhalation, imagine all obstacles linked with female potencies expelled from the red channel in the form of light pink air. These include illnesses associated with bile as well as obstacles and obscurations associated with the future.

Third Three Breaths

Men and Women: Place the left hand on top of the right in the lap, palms up. Inhale green healing light through both nostrils. Visualize it moving down the side channels to the juncture with the main channel, four fingerwidths below the navel. With the exhalation, visualize the energy rising up the central channel and out the top of the head. Complete three inhalations and exhalations. With each exhalation, imagine all potencies for illnesses associated with hostile spirits expelled from the top of the head in the form of black smoke. Also expel illnesses associated with phlegm and any other obstacles and obscurations associated with the present.

Earth

Go to a natural setting where there is a strong sense of the qualities of earth

and sit on the ground. If you are sensitive to these kinds of energies, or would like to develop this sensitivity, walk around and try to find the place with the strongest earth energy. Don't get neurotic about it—either you actually have this sensitivity or you are using your imagination. It doesn't matter which for now; you are finding support for the practice and that is what matters. When you find a spot, sit there. If you want to do more, dig out a hollow, preferably in the shape of a square. You can lie on your stomach and connect to the earth and the energy of the earth through your navel chakra. Don't worry about whether or not this is "real." Imagination is the tool that develops the practice; use it and don't worry about it.

After you learn the practices in the following chapter, you can also say the mantra and transform yourself into the earth goddess, but for now just connect through the raw element.

Contact with the physical earth is important but need not be elaborate. You can do the practice sitting in a chair. Wherever you are right now as you read this, feel the ground beneath you. Feel the stability of it, the immensity of the planet, the gravity that holds you to it. Connect with the raw element. Let yourself be affected by it. Let your imagination be free. Feel the stability and internalize it. Bring it in through your skin. Feel it in your flesh, your bones, your central channel, your heart, your consciousness. Make it subtler and subtler, until it pervades your experience, until you merge with it.

This stability is always present and available and can be internalized whenever it is needed. The next time you are feeling ungrounded, scattered, insecure, or weak, retrieve earth. If you are knocked off balance in your relationships or at work or in your internal processes, make the decision to immediately feel grounded, focused, solid, and balanced by connecting to earth. Use the natural environment to develop these positive qualities. Visit places in which you naturally feel grounded and internalize the quality. Or focus in your body when you need to ground. Your body is very earthy: the feeling in it is the life of the earth. Bring your awareness there, relax, and connect. The elemental energy is already in you, is you; it's a question of bringing it to awareness, activating it, remembering it.

Water

If you live near an ocean, a large lake, a flowing river, or a still pond, go to it. If you are near none of these, simply pay attention to the water in your shower or bath and the water you drink. Or you can just use your imagination. Imagine the ocean: the coolness of it, the power of it, how it flows, and the calm of its depths. The body of the ocean is peaceful even when the surface is agitated.

Connect with those qualities. If you can, feel the energy of water in your body. Internalize it. Bring it into your skin, your muscle, your bone. Feel the comfort of water, the relaxation, the ease as it flows around rock, opens and accepts what falls in it, rests in whatever holds it.

We lose this comfort too often. It is the comfort of being itself, the ease of being. We see someone who upsets us or we go to a party or a business appointment and feel uptight, jerky, and agitated. The water element is diminished. Recall such situations, but this time feel the comfort of water. Let the events unfold while you remain internally at peace. And when you find yourself next in a situation in which you are agitated, annoyed, overly critical, or worried, connect to water. The elemental energy is everywhere, even in the driest desert–though it helps to be near water for support when you're first learning the practice.

Water is comforting. Like earth, it gives a feeling of stability. It is accepting of others, of events, of self. Water also has to do with elimination, purification, and cleansing. It is associated with feelings of peace and comfort and gentle joy.

Fire

When you have time, find a sunny place such as a bench, sun-drenched and warm. Or if the sun isn't out, sit in comfort before a fire. If you can do neither, sit next to a heater or a stove, or imagine being near a fire. Pay attention to what you feel: the warmth on your skin, the relaxation. Bring the heat in through your flesh to the channels of the body. Feel the heat of fire circulating through your body, the heat of the blood, the heat of the metabolism, the heat of the muscles, the heat of the nerves firing. Feel emotional warmth and joy. Retrieve the quality. Feel it fill the center of your body, fill the central channel. Feel the warmth in your heart, the center of your being. Allow it to pervade consciousness.

The pleasure of sitting in the sunlight feels good, but without internalizing the quality of fire only part of what is being offered is received. Besides heat and comfort, the energy of fire has to do with ripening and maturing. Fire purifies through burning negativities. Fire is the underlying elemental energy of creativity and accomplishment and of both substantial and insubstantial bliss. Fire is related to orgasm and, more subtly, to the bliss of energy moving through the central channel.

When you are feeling uninspired, dull, or flat, connect with fire. When working with a negative habit or tendency in yourself, burn it in the fire of your practice. Use your mind to bring fire into areas of your body that are sick or wounded; use it to purify what is there and to invigorate the healing

process. When you feel weak and uncertain, connect with fire for its strength and its creative vision. When you are weary or uninspired, draw on fire to give strength to the will.

In the advanced practice of inner fire (tummo) the psychic fire is developed. Successful yogis who practice the inner fire are able to live in the cold climate of Tibet with little clothing because they can draw on the energy of fire that is always present.

Air

Air allows flow and movement. When a strong wind arises, let it blow away your negative karma. When a gentle breeze arises, let it carry away discomfort, fear, and negative thoughts.

Go to a place where there is wind, perhaps a mountain pass or a beach. Or go where the air is cool and clean—in the shade of a forest or beside a river. Gentle your breathing. Feel the movement of air. Internalize it—the freedom of it, the quick intelligence of it. Feel the life moving in your flesh and in your thoughts, and the prana moving in the channels of the body. Recognize the air in the central channel, in the heart, in consciousness. The principal quality of air is flexibility; it is free.

Air lifts the spirit, lifts the mood. When you're feeling down or depressed, connect to air. Air is light, unbound, pervasive. Internalize that. When stuck in an argument, in a depression, in a narrow point of view, connect to the flexibility of air. Escape the prison of constricted mental habits by connecting with air and flying above the walls of negative conditioning.

Strong air makes for fast progress on the spiritual path, but without balanced earth and water the result does not remain. Tantric practices with channels, chakras, and prana develop the qualities of air. In the practice of the transference of consciousness (pho wa) air is utilized to move consciousness from the confusion of ignorance to the clarity of realization. Air allows the shift of consciousness. The air element underlies life-force. Connect with air to build vitality and to develop greater freedom.

Space

Sky gazing is a very important practice. Go up on the top of a hill where there is a big, unobstructed view of the sky. In front of you is vast space. Your eyes should be open, your body relaxed, your breath free and easy. Breathe in the open, clear sky, and allow yourself to dissolve in it when you exhale. Let pure, infinite space pervade your body, your energy, your mind. Integrate your awareness with space. Merge with space.

When you integrate with space, healing occurs. The tight, constricted

knots of anger and fear, of desire and worry, dissolve. Tensions dissolve. Thoughts dissolve. Your many identities start to dissolve. The more you integrate with the space element, the clearer and more expansive your awareness becomes, unstained by whatever arises in it, always fresh, open, and unconstrained. Space accommodates everything without effort. Don't let this practice be merely a conceptual exercise; internalize the experience of empty space, find it in you and as you. At this level of practice, it isn't so much about realizing the nature of mind (as it would be when done as a Dzogchen practice) as it is about dissolving daily problems, making space for positive experience, and finding and developing the capacity to release what is negative.

When the element of space is developed, the mind is clearer and there is more joy. There is less tension. There is more room for whatever experiences arise. If someone is late for an appointment, it's okay—you have the space to accommodate that. If you find you have heavy responsibilities, that's all right—there's room for everything. This doesn't mean that you have to accept everything; instead, you can make a decision and act from awareness rather than reacting impulsively from emotional responses.

In meditation practice, when the space element is truly developed, the practice becomes Dzogchen, abiding in the nature of mind. It is pure presence. Fully integrating oneself with space is integrating with the ground of being.

Dedication

At the end of all practices, imagine that you have accumulated merit by engaging in spiritual practice. Dedicate this merit to the welfare of all beings. Generate the heartfelt wish that all beings be freed from suffering and that they find the spiritual path. There are many prayers that can be recited or sung, but more important is to actually develop compassion.

ELEMENTAL SPIRITS

Many cultures that live close to the earth develop an appreciation for the spiritual dimension of the natural elements. They recognize that the elements are not only raw materials—they are also an environment in which deities and higher and lower spirits abide. There are sentient beings living in each element.

In the level of the teachings that I'm calling shamanic, the forces that affect us are taken to be outside of us rather than in our bodies or minds. According to shamanism, the forces of nature are alive; spirits reside in the

rivers, trees, rocks, mountains, waterfalls, fires, planets, sky, valleys, caves, and so on. These spirits are related to the five external elements in the way that our internal experience is related to our bodies. Whatever our philosophy, we normally experience ourselves as residing "in" our bodies. Similarly, lakes, trees, and rocks are bodies in which spirits reside. In shamanism these entities are not thought to be mental projections or of questionable reality. They are autonomous and self-directed. Those non-physical beings with whom we have contact can be neutral toward us or they can obstruct us or support us.

When we buy a house or piece of land, we feel some kind of satisfaction that the land is now ours. But there are already numerous beings on that land who did not participate in our real estate transaction. There are a great number of non-physical beings whom we can't see with our physical eyes as well as many substantial visible beings such as insects, birds, and animals that dwell in the trees or burrow in the ground. In some sense, they own the land, too. They will fight others of their kind to preserve their own space and maintain their boundaries, just as we do. Yet we come on the land and dig up their burrows, cut down the trees that hold their nests, uproot the plants they use for food, and destroy their eggs and their babies. How would you react if some other type of being suddenly occupied your home, moved or broke all your things, or buried your house under concrete? We bring this kind of harm to other beings that are visible to us and we also bring this kind of harm to beings invisible to us.

When we build a new house, depending on how we relate to the land and the beings on the land, we will either be hindered or supported by the spirits of the area. They can harm us by inflicting diseases, causing obstacles in work or relationships, affecting our minds and making spiritual practice difficult, and affecting our energy and leaving us fatigued, depressed, agitated, or confused. On the other hand, they can increase our vitality, protect us from and remove disturbing non-substantial energies in our environment, help us to focus our minds for spiritual practice, help us to heal, and develop harmonious relationship with us.

In Tibetan there is a word, *sa-dak*, that relates to the earth element. It means "earth spirit," though the literal translation is "earth lord." When Tibetan practitioners use the earth–to grow food, to build a house, or to make a road–they request permission to do so from the earth spirits.

Just as the earth is full of beings, physical and non-physical, so is space. As with the earth, these beings and this element are not there just for us to use as we wish. Space is a fundamental aspect of existence and is also a habitat for many different kinds of beings who live in it much as we do.

Tibetans believe that in the space occupying a corner of a room live thousands of beings about whom we know nothing.

We share all the elements with many beings. Some live even in fire and the space between stars. Our activities affect these other beings, and they affect us.

Tibetans talk about the "eight classes of beings": *srin po, ma mo, 'dre, rak sha, btsan, rgyal po, bdud,* and *klu*. The beings in each class are known to have characteristic appearances, temperaments, and relations to humans. For example, the klu are subterranean spirits associated with the water element. They can be very intelligent and have much interaction with the human world. In Bön it is believed that klu are often responsible for illnesses and other obstacles in life. It is also believed that Dzogchen and other teachings have been taught throughout the world of the klu and that teachings can be received from the klu.

The spirits associated with rocks are called btsan. They are usually represented as red people riding red horses, sometimes with red flags. In rocky places there are often holes, tunnels, connections between one area and another; Tibetans believe that these act as roadways for the btsan and that they shouldn't be blocked by a building or a road. This is because the spirits can take revenge on those who block their way by inflicting pain in the heart area and sometimes even causing death by heart attack.

The gyalpo are a class of spirits who were once powerful humans who died and were reborn as this kind of spirit. Gyalpo means "king." Sometimes they take forms familiar to us, human or animal, and sometimes they are completely unfamiliar in form. They are especially found in castles where kings and royalty were murdered. In Europe I encountered many stories of ghosts, usually of people who died a violent death. From the Tibetan point of view these could be gyalpo. The gyalpo can be tamed by strong practitioners who are sensitive to the non-physical world and who know the proper practices. Once the gyalpo are tamed, practitioners can often convert them, teach them religion, and extract their promise to protect a doctrine or religious group.

There are spirits in trees and green fields as well as in areas of strong energy such as the center of large, flat places. There are spirits at the junctures of roads. There are spirits of space—here not considered one of the eight classes—called *namthel,* that are known to be very hairy. In northern Tibet, where my mother was born, there are many of these spirits and they are propitiated by the people who live there. Often the spirits become protectors for villages and individuals–relationships that last for lifetimes. They often appear in dreams with messages for those they are protecting.

Because spirits can be positive or negative in relation to humans, it is wise

to be careful with practices that connect the practitioner to a spirit. It is currently popular for people to take drum journeys in their imaginations and to look for guardian spirits and power animals and so on. Although usually this is beneficial, or at least harmless, there really are beings with whom the rare individual will connect. Not all of them are beings anyone should want to connect with. There seems to be little regard for who the being is; this can be a dangerous practice. People are much more careful about choosing a business partner or a roommate than they seem to be about choosing a non-physical being for a guide or guardian.

In the Tibetan traditions we connect to specific deities and spirits who are already identified in the tradition. In most of our healing practices we connect with beings who have been tamed and have agreed to act as guardians, protectors, guides, and supports for healing. In the ritual texts there is usually a short explanation of when the specific beings were brought into the religious practice. They were wild spirits and then a past master tamed them; the master's name will be in the text as part of the explanation. When they were tamed they agreed to help in a particular fashion and were bound by vows. In return practitioners have promised to make offerings to them, usually ritual offerings or liturgies; the texts specify what needs to be done. The rituals are passed down the lineage from master to student or from parent to child. When we begin these practices we are entering into an established relationship with the spirits, not starting a new one, and there are stages in the development of the relationship that are explained in the teachings that accompany the practice.

I know that many people have difficulty thinking of spirits in the way I describe them. There are many spirits described in Tibetan texts related to specific places in Tibet. I'm not sure, if we live in New York or Tokyo, that it's very helpful to try to connect to those spirits. When we are in Western cities, rather than thinking of spirits living in mountain passes or caves, we might find it easier to think that spirits travel the streets, creating anger and agitation in the drivers. When we experience aggressive driving, it is a good idea to breathe evenly and relax. Otherwise, we may find ourselves connected to traffic demons!

In any case, it's appropriate to become sensitive to the beings who live in the elements and to ask for their permission and good-will before making changes to their habitats. And after we have made changes we should thank those beings who have been affected. We are only one species surrounded by innumerable other sentient beings of various types, all of whom wish to be happy and free of suffering.

Developing this sensitivity and compassion is part of our growth and is a

step toward recognizing that the planet is alive and sacred, that the elements are not just resources but are fundamental aspects of a living universe. Living in harmony with the natural world is not only a matter of our survival. We know of many species now facing extinction due to the advances of the modern world. And there are many others about which we know nothing who are also being harmed by us. Not all of them are without defenses, but certainly none of them deserves extinction at our hands.

Imagine a being from another dimension encountering us and seeing only flesh. Imagine this being not realizing that we are alive, that we have intelligence and imagination, that our lives are the insubstantial aspect and the flesh is the substantial aspect. And instead seeing only flesh, only meat. That's what it's like when we look at the elements and see only dead physical processes; we miss the sacred and alive aspect of the elements, the spirits that live in them and are of them. When our bodies get sick, we suffer in our insubstantial mind, not just in our flesh. In the same way, the raw elements are important for the beings who abide in them. For them, the destruction or degradation of the natural environment is like an illness in the body and they suffer on insubstantial levels, just as we do.

It's easy to discount invisible spirits, but doing so is damaging. When we ignore these beings, there are negative provocations from the spirit side. Diseases arise that, we believe, come from disturbed spirits. We call these diseases "time diseases." In the West the same diseases may be thought of as the results of negative environmental factors—pollution and chemicals and so on.

Some non-physical beings are aware of us, many are not. Some are harmful to us, some are beneficial. They can be our allies or our enemies depending on what kind of relationship we build with them.

RELATING TO NON-PHYSICAL BEINGS

Doing the ritual practices is not like going to a doctor and getting a pill. Healing is something we can do for ourselves. We need to learn to protect ourselves from illness and negativity. One way to do this is through making offerings, which pacifies spirits and also develops generosity and compassion.

In the following practices, we ritually invite four levels of guests to attend. We have a different relationship with each type of guest.

First Guests

The first guests are the fully enlightened beings, the buddhas and

bodhisattvas and enlightened masters. Included are the tutelary deities (yidam), fully realized goddesses (*khandro*), and all beings who are free of ignorance and who have perfected the five wisdoms. These guests we do not control. We don't tell them what to do—we ask for their blessings.

First guests are always invited in meditation practice. They are the beings to whom we bow when doing prostrations and to whom we turn for refuge. Energy is needed for healing and it is important to connect with the right source for that energy and have the right relationship with that source. The best source is the first guest.

Second Guests

The guests of the second level are generally not fully enlightened but are nevertheless powerful. They are beings from the god realms, beings in the retinues of major deities, guardians, and dharma protectors. Second guests may include powerful beings from any realm of existence. In the Western tradition, angels are considered powerful beings, often frightening to encounter; these would be considered second guests. Also included would be spirits associated with planets. In the West we don't think of the planets as beings, but they are: the moon embodies a being as do the sun and the other planets.

Many healing practices are done with the help of the second guests and we treat them with respect and devotion.

Third Guests

The guests of the third level are all those beings with whom we have karmic connections and the beings from the eight classes that I described earlier. This means everyone with whom we have connected and with whom we still have karma—friends and enemies from this lifetime and all previous lifetimes. It doesn't have to be a negative thing that connects us; it can be something that simply needs to be completed. However, as this practice is about healing, it's most important to invite the beings with whom we have a connection in need of healing. A karmic debt means a karmic connection. For example, in the business world two people may run into difficulties with each other but because of the circumstances are unable to let the relationship go. Or there are people who seem to be intent on making things difficult for us or who irritate us for no reason. Such situations indicate a karmic debt.

Many of the disturbances and obstacles we encounter in life have to do with interference from the karmic guests. Just as we can have trouble in life

with a neighbor or colleague with whom we have a bad relationship, so it is with non-physical beings. When there is a problem, it isn't helpful to think it is the fault of the other, whether human or spirit. It's better to realize there is something that needs to be done, something we have to do. Like us, the spirit would rather not be involved in a disturbance.

Ritual practice is a way to finish the disturbance. Through it, debts can be paid. That's the principle in shamanic practices. We can heal these connections through ceremonies, offerings, burning food, or offering smoke, as described below.

Fourth Guests

The fourth guests are the guests of compassion. These are the beings who are weaker than we are and who can benefit from our help. In the Bön shamanic tradition it is important to develop compassion as the foundation for practice.

A motivation to do shamanic practice that is based on having some kind of spiritual adventure or becoming distinguished as a special person will not be helpful. It seems to me that many of the current shamanic traditions don't have true stages of growth. Drumming and taking journeys, leaving the body and having imaginal experiences, seem to be what is considered important. But if that's all there is, it might be more helpful for the practitioners to have vivid in-the-body experiences.

If the motivation is a desire to help others, to heal and alleviate suffering, then the intention is based on compassion. In this case shamanic practice will grow and lead naturally into the higher practices.

The more the spirits connected to us are happy, the happier our lives. This is true on every level. When the beings around us are happy—neighbors, spouses, friends, children, the people we work with—it makes us happy. When a person we are connected with is not happy, often he or she wants happiness from us. And often we don't know what we can give—and sometimes we can't give, or we don't want to give. And then we have a problem.

Similarly, beings in the spirit realms can want or need something from us and we don't know how to give it to them. We don't realize that we can give something non-physical. In the West, material is valued. It's harder to value gifts that are immaterial, though we know how important they are. To be given love, trust, respect, honesty, and friendship by others is of great value; it's more than money can buy. Spirits are non-physical and can be satisfied with non-physical offerings. The best basis for these offerings is compassion.

MAKING OFFERINGS

In all traditions of Tibetan spiritual practice, offerings are regularly made to spirits. The mandala offering, part of the foundational practices of Bön as well as the four schools of Tibetan Buddhism, is an offering to the first and second guests. The practice of *chöd* is an offering to all four guests and particularly to karmic guests. The dedication of merit that follows every practice is an offering to all, particularly the lower three guests who are still in samsara. We offer the food we eat and whatever we drink. We offer what is beautiful to those above us. We offer our wastes to whomever can benefit from them. Everything can be offered; the only limit is whatever limit we impose. In the causal vehicles a large number of offering practices are described.

Some offering rituals are very elaborate, involving many days of preparation. The offerings can include all kinds of food, *torma* (figures made from parched and dyed barley flour), alcohol, specially prepared texts, precious jewels and stones, long prayers, repetitions of mantras, and many other materials. Offerings can also be made from left-over food at dinner, or made wholly in the imagination. Although most often we simply make offerings through visualization, it is also good to make substantial offerings. It helps to focus the ritual and makes it more profound.

With some practices like soul retrieval, we are recovering what is lost or healing what is damaged and making offerings is part of these practices. But we should also regularly make offerings even when everything is fine. We can make offerings to maintain harmony with non-physical beings in order to keep them from creating obstacles, to ask them to remove obstacles that already exist, to be of benefit to the spirits, to request their support in worldly and spiritual matters, to honor our obligations to protectors and guardians and tantric deities, and to develop generosity in ourselves.

Although I won't go into great detail on offering practices, I have included information on some of the ways we make regular offerings.

One offering is called *chang bu*, a fingerprint torma. This can be done for oneself or for another person. The torma is made from barley flour and water, although another flour can be substituted. A dough is made, not so wet as to become sticky but wet enough to hold a shape. It is shaped into a thick roll and squeezed in the hand as if the hand were squeezing a tube. A little oil is put on the hand first so that the dough will not stick. Men use the right hand, women the left. The dough takes on the imprint of the hand, marked with ridges and knots where the dough is squeezed into the wrinkles of the palm and the seams where the fingers lie beside each other. We corre-

late the impressions of the five fingers to the five elements and the lines in the dough made by the bends in the fingers to the sense offerings.

Once the dough is shaped it is touched to any part of the body that needs healing. Touch on the body draws attention to the place touched; prana follows the attention since mind and prana always move together. With the attention on a single part of the body, sensation in that part increases. We can experience this by touching any place on our bodies and putting our attention there. When this is done with the chang bu, we use our imagination to draw the illness, trauma, or negativity into the dough. We should then try to feel a release in that area of the body. Then we can move the torma to another part of the body that needs healing. When we have finished, we have a substantial symbol of our illnesses, one that is energetically connected to us; this is offered to the third and fourth guests, the beings who may be causing and maintaining the illness. The intent behind the ritual is not only to remove the influence of the spirit from the body, but also to give the spirit something, which is done through the offering. What is given has some of the energetic properties of the illness, but it is now in a purer form that will nourish and satisfy the spirit. When it accepts the offering, it leaves the person whom it has afflicted.

After the ritual is finished, the offering is taken outside and thrown in the direction opposite the individual's birth year sign, the direction, it is believed, in which the negative force is most likely to originate. (If you don't know your sign, refer to the chart at the end of this book.) Traditionally, after a ritual like this we look for a dream that signifies success, such as a dream of insects, animals, liquid, or other beings or negative substances coming out of the body.

We can also make triangular torma to offer the guardians and protectors. The triangular form represents fire and is painted red and given to wrathful beings such as Dorje Phurba or Yeshe Walmo. Round tormas are painted white or yellow and offered to peaceful deities such as Shenla Odkar, Chamma, or Tara. Energetically we are offering different qualities in order to activate different qualities of different beings.

We make more elaborate offerings for the many "ransom" rituals described in texts. Ransom is offered when it seems a person is strongly possessed by a spirit or when the affliction is powerful. It means what it sounds like: when someone is being held, ransom is given in return for his or her freedom. But we can't just use money for ransom, as with kidnappers. Instead we offer non-physical beings what is practical for them, offerings that nourish them.

The ransom is a symbolic image of the person made from flour, like the

torma described above. Around the figure are all kinds of offerings: bread, cheese, sugar, salt, food with a variety of tastes, a small amount of money as a symbol of wealth, and some clothes belonging to the sick person. The person being healed can also write down on paper what is to be given away, what is not wanted; these are also an offering. The figure can be small or large. When Shardza Rinpoche, one of the most famous of the Bön masters of recent centuries, was very ill, his students made a life-size effigy from dough and offered it to the spirits. But it is the intensity of the practice that makes the symbolism work, not the size of the offering.

My mother was sick once for a very long time. We took her to many doctors but there was no lessening of her illness. The one thing that seemed very helpful was a big ransom we offered for her. An effigy of my mother was made, dressed in her clothes, and given to the spirits as ransom. We made food as if she were going on a long journey. And then we gave it to the spirits who held her health captive. Even my mother's name was sent with the effigy. Before the ransom, my mother's name was Dolma. Afterwards she was a new person named Yeshe Lhamo. My mother had identified with the person who is sick. The ransom allowed her to instead become the person who was healed. When we identify with our suffering and illness, it becomes difficult to heal because healing means giving up our identity. If we can shift our identity, the sickness or suffering can be left behind. The spirit, too, is connected to a particular identity and if we leave that identity behind, the spirit is left behind with it.

Making offerings can be very simple. When Lopon Tenzin Namdak Rinpoche first visited the United States, I took him to a large grocery store. He was amazed at the amount of food in the stores. He said it was a good place to practice offering, walking through the aisles, offering the food to the four guests. We don't even need to buy anything. In all types of offerings we have to use our minds and energy to make the offerings real. The actual offering is given on the imaginal level. The physical offering is the ritual that supports the actual, energetic offering.

There are many spirits who would like to participate and to receive some of the offerings, but they are too weak or afraid to come unless we invite them. When we do, they are able to attend.

Before eating a meal, offer it up to the first and second guests. At the end of the meal, simply allow the third and fourth guests to have what remains. Nothing will disappear from our plates, but energetically something is being given and something received. When lighting a fire, we can offer the smoke, which with imagination can be turned into anything you think a spirit will need.

We can burn small amounts of specially prepared food to carry the offering to spirits and to the dead. When someone close to us dies, we make smoke offerings for forty-nine days, which Tibetans believe is the time it takes to move through the intermediate states on the way to rebirth.

Make offerings to all four of the guests. Don't forget the karmic guests, the beings to whom you have a connection, to whom you may owe a debt of some kind. Invite them—they are going to be in your life anyway. Open your heart and ask them to come, to receive what you are offering. If you then get quiet and settled, you may see images connected to these guests. Sometimes these images appear in dreams. If not an image, an emotion may arise. In either case, what is it or who is it that appears? Some dream figures give you something, but these are not the ones with whom we're concerned. It's the ones who seem to want something from you; they ask for or demand something. And what they want, you offer. Burn some food; as the smoke rises, imagine it turning into whatever the spirit may want. That is enough. Making offerings develops the capacities of generosity, sensitivity, and compassion.

When you move to a new place, pay attention to dreams and experiences. You have new spirit neighbors as well as physical neighbors, and in both cases it is good to develop good relationships. Make offerings to the spirits of the place. If you plan to build or to change the land in some fashion, ask permission and make offerings. You may have to ask the spirits to leave an area in which you are building. Be gentle, but if they don't want to go, you may need to be wrathful instead.

It's supportive, when performing a big ritual such as a ransom, to schedule it for the evening before the new moon. People tend to be a little more vulnerable at night as energy declines, and it makes sense to work with negative forces then.

Offerings should be done for special occasions, such as when someone is sick or dying. They can also be done regularly, once a month if you wish. Food and drink and mandala offerings can be done daily. When yogis do retreats in the mountains, they may wish for support from the local spirits and will make an offering of burned food every day.

In the West, where people are more likely to attribute problems to psychological or biological processes than to spirits, offerings can still be done. For the person who psychologizes all problems, the offering will be psychologized, too, and will be of benefit.

When you're finished with these rituals, put the offerings outside. If it is food, let the wild animals and insects eat it. As I wrote before, offering isn't about getting physical substance to non-physical beings, it's about using

physical substance to empower internal practices. It's the imagination and the feeling brought to the practice that will make it effective or not.

Making offerings is a gesture of the heart and a beautiful expression of generosity. If you consistently generate this experience in your life, it will have a positive effect.

SOUL LOSS AND THE RETRIEVAL OF THE ELEMENTAL ENERGIES

In the Tibetan tradition, as in many shamanic traditions, there is the notion of "soul loss." Although this is an imbalance of the elements, it is greater than the imbalances suffered in normal life. It is a question of degree. Soul loss is a profound loss of elemental qualities and a condition of extreme imbalance that usually, though not always, is caused by traumatic external situations and beings.

We say that the soul can be stolen by malevolent beings of the eight classes. What this means is that negative external beings and forces can damage our capacities for positive human qualities. When these qualities are lost, they can be retrieved through the practice of soul retrieval. "Soul retrieval" is how I am translating *la lu (bla bslu)*. The ritual is complicated and if one is truly interested in learning it, one must find a qualified master and receive the instructions over a period of time. What I am teaching here is related to soul retrieval but is a different practice, the "retrieval of the elements" *('byung ba'i bcud 'dus)*.

Sutra, tantra, and the shamanic vehicles include practices to reconnect us to the positive qualities. This process is not just about having pleasant experiences; it is about connecting to deeper aspects of ourselves. Although ultimately we need to go beyond the dualism of positive and negative, until we actually do, positive qualities lead us closer to the experience of the base of existence, while negative qualities distract us and lead further into abstraction.

When the elemental qualities are lost, there is a flattening of experience, a loss of richness and resonance. This is similar to the experience of a broken heart. A man or woman loses a spouse or partner in a shocking way, is betrayed or abandoned, and he or she closes the heart. This is a familiar theme in novels and movies: the person can't love because of the fear of being hurt again. The same kind of inner damage can happen when someone loses a child, is raped, witnesses brutality, is subjected to brutality, goes through a war, is in a car accident, or loses a house—the catastrophes and calamities that fall upon us humans. The shock to the soul overwhelms it

with fear, loss, or some other powerful emotion and the result is the loss of positive qualities, the loss of life-force and vitality, the loss of joy and empathy. It may also result in physical frailty and the loss of sensory clarity.

The loss can happen all at once—as in the case of a single devastating incident—or over time when there's a traumatizing or dehumanizing environment. In the shamanic view, the loss in both these scenarios is always related to negative spirits. In the West it is understood that when we are physically or psychically weakened, we become more susceptible to infections from bacteria and virus; we are also more susceptible to the influence of non-physical beings. Whether we're damaged by non-physical negative forces or external events such as an accident or illness, the damage can be the same: the loss of capacities, of elemental energies. In other words, soul loss.

After an accident, for instance, an individual may experience lassitude, a loss of inspiration and creativity, or a loss of vigor. This condition may heal naturally but if it doesn't, if the fire energy has been lost, it can become chronic. This may show up in work and in relationships, and may manifest in the body as an illness and in the mind as a disturbance in cognitive activity. The accident is the apparent cause of the loss, but the actual loss either can result directly from the trauma or can come as the person is weakened and vulnerable to malevolent external beings. In either case, the damage is rooted in the soul.

Perhaps when you put your attention in the area of your heart chakra, for example, you feel nothing. Just keep it there. You may feel strange sensations. You may feel pain. If you have been hurt in such a way that your soul is damaged, one of the chakras may be closed. You may need to spend a long time feeling your way in to it. This shutting down can be minor—an instinct to close yourself off for protection—or it can be more serious and manifest as a chronic lack of capacity.

Soul loss can appear as depression. Or, if earth is lost, as anxiety. If fire is lost, it may show as dullness. And so on. Traditionally the symptoms of soul loss are said to be paleness, a loss of color in the face; a lack of vitality; an inability to concentrate, and perhaps an inability to walk well. Focus is lost in physical, emotional, verbal, and mental behavior. People may feel weak. They can't function the way they did before. They can't get to work on time. They can't get as much done as they did before. They can't think clearly. This state can continue until the loss manifests as a more substantial disease in the body.

In traditional Tibetan culture, when people begin to suffer from this kind of condition, they ask for a divination, considered an important means to

diagnose the source of energy disturbances and to indicate what can be done to heal those disturbances. Divination sometimes suggests the need for a soul retrieval. In other cases, even without divination, people may feel that a soul retrieval is warranted. They then ask a lama or yogi to perform the ritual for them or, if they know how, perform the ritual for themselves.

THE ARROW, TURQUOISE, AND SOUL DEER

During the soul retrieval certain ritual objects are used by the practitioner. Although I describe them here, this is not meant as an instruction on how to use them. In the practice that follows they are not required. I include their description in order to give a fuller understanding of the soul retrieval ritual.

Normally a ritual arrow called a *da-dar* is used. It is made from a piece of bamboo with three joints representing the la, yee, and sem. The arrow is used to make a connection to the elemental energies. The shaman first calls to the four guests and petitions them for help. The arrow is like a wire attached to the source of power, in this case to the four guests and the environment. During the soul retrieval, while the goddesses travel to retrieve the elemental essence, the practitioner holds the arrow point down and makes a slow, counter-clockwise circle overhead with the opposite end of the arrow. As the arrow moves away from the practitioner, it gathers the elemental energy. As it moves back in, the gathered energy is brought to the practitioner. The energies of the life-span are retrieved through five colored ribbons tied to the top of the arrow—white, green, red, blue, and yellow—representing the five elements, and symbolically stored in the arrow itself.

The arrow is not the only symbolic receptacle for the healing energies. Most Bön-po people wear turquoise as a necklace. This is the soul stone, the *la-gyu*, the symbolic holder of the soul. During the ritual, the turquoise of the person being healed (if it is not the practitioner) is placed in front of the practitioner and energies retrieved with the arrow are directed into it.

The third symbolic container is the soul deer, *sha-wa*. The figure of a deer is made out of dough. In its heart is a piece of paper or fabric inscribed with the syllable *NI*, representing the seed of the human soul. Into the syllable in the deer's heart are directed the energies of the life-force. At the end of the ritual, the deer is given to the person who is being healed and is then kept on that person's personal altar.

It is good to receive direct instructions on preparing and using these ritual objects. They support the practice, but they are not necessary. The real support of the practice is the attention, the mind, the imagination, and the feeling generated by the practitioner's strong intent.

THE PRACTICE OF RETRIEVING THE ELEMENTAL ENERGIES

In this section are the instructions for the practice of Retrieving the Elemental Essences. As I wrote before, the soul retrieval is a complex ritual with great depth that must be learned directly from a master. The practice given here is the retrieval of the elemental energy. This practice, unlike the soul retrieval, is meant to be done for yourself, not for others, though of course it can be dedicated to the benefit of someone else.

I have made some small changes in the practice based on my own experience. For example, the order of the elements is different than in the text. Also the text suggests that when the practitioner works with the fire element, the knees be drawn up, the ankles remain crossed, and the knees be held by the arms. This is meant to generate more heat but is not necessary. The text starts with the seed syllables in the heart, and from them the transformation begins; I teach the practice with the syllables moving toward the practitioner from the far reaches of infinite space. It may be that the first is better suited for people dominated by earth or water, who benefit from their energy moving out, and the latter may be best for those dominated by fire and air, who benefit from the energy moving in. Feel free to try both ways to find which is best for you.

I have included the original text in an appendix so that those who read Tibetan will have access to the source material.

In order to make it easier to follow the text while doing the practice, the steps of the practice are written below in italics, followed by an explanation in regular type. Read through the entire practice a few times until you have grasped the whole. Then, when you actually begin the practice, the italicized lines should be enough. After you have worked with the practice for some time, the outline that begins the following section should be all you need.

Outline of the Practice

Preliminary Practices:

Nine Purification Breaths
Guru Yoga
Invite and connect to the four guests

The Main Practice:

Sound the seed mantra three, five, or seven times; transform into the

elemental goddess. Recite the mantra of the goddess. Recite the mantra of the combined elements.

Evoke the elemental goddess in the organ. Recite the three mantras.

The goddesses travel to retrieve the lost elemental qualities.

The elemental energies fill the organ.

Recite the seed mantra. The goddess from the organ fills the central channel with the elemental essence.

The qualities and energies are internalized in the deepest level of yourself, the most subtle levels of experience, as you recite the mantra of the goddess. Then recite the mantra of the combined elements.

Abide in pure presence.

The practice is repeated for each of the five elements.

Recite the long-life mantra.

Merit from the practice is dedicated to the welfare of all beings.

The Nine Purification Breaths

Do the preliminary practice of the Nine Purification Breaths. Directions for this practice were described earlier in the book (see pp. 41-42).

Guru Yoga

Perform Guru Yoga.

Guru Yoga is a fundamental practice in all Tibetan traditions. If you have not already been taught a specific form of the practice, you can visualize all the enlightened beings and teachers to whom you are connected and pray to them. Relax your body and open your heart. Generate feelings of devotion and gratitude. Make a sincere request for aid and support on the spiritual journey, and particularly for the practice you are about to do.

The central figure in the visualization can be a Buddha or your teacher. If you have received the appropriate initiation or transmission, you may use a male or female visionary deity. Visualize a great wisdom fire coming from the heart of the Master, burning away your negative karmic traces and obstructions. After the flame, imagine powerful wisdom winds rushing from the Master's heart, blowing away the residue of the fire and any remaining obstructions. Finally, visualize a torrent of pure water streaming from the heart of the Master, washing away any remaining negativities, leaving you completely purified—a pure vessel fit for the sacred teachings.

Now, receive initiation from the Master: A beam of pure white light, originating in the chakra behind the Master's brow, shines into your corre-

sponding chakra situated between and behind the eyebrows. Through this you receive the initiation and empowerment of the body. Feel your entire body relax. Then a pure red light radiates from the Master's throat chakra into your throat chakra. Through this you receive the initiation and empowerment of the energy. Feel an even deeper relaxation. After this, a pure blue light shines from the Master's heart into your own. Through this you receive the initiation and empowerment of the mind. Feel a relaxation into the most subtle dimension of yourself. Then imagine the Master and the surrounding enlightened beings transforming into light that enters your body through the crown chakra and then descends to rest in your heart. Let all effort, visualization, and thought dissolve, and rest in clear presence. If you have been introduced to the nature of mind, abide in that during the practice. If not, remain as present and aware as possible.

The Four Guests

Invite and connect to the four guests.

Invite the four guests and visualize them in the space above you and surrounding you on all sides. Connect with them. Don't limit yourself, be open. Feel an emotional and energetic connection. Let it change you, soften you, and revitalize you. Find a greater lightness in yourself. Let go of what is negative. This kind of spiritual practice is not passive; you must be involved. If you have a strong intent and open yourself, higher forces and entities will respond, but if you do all this mechanically there will be little benefit.

Invite the first guests

The first guests include the buddhas and enlightened protectors and bodhisattvas, the teachers of the lineage to which you are connected, and the deities to whom you have tantric commitments. The illuminated goddesses of the elements are included in the first guests. Visualize them and feel their presence. They are beautiful, fully enlightened goddesses. The Space Goddess is white, the Air Goddess is green, the Fire Goddess is red, the Water Goddess is blue, and the Earth Goddess is yellow. Make prayers to the goddesses, requesting help in removing internal and external obstacles, retrieving the lost and damaged qualities of the soul, and overcoming even the innermost spiritual obstacles. Ask for blessings, for power and support, and for guidance. Be clear about what you're asking for. These are the enlightened beings and, though beyond turmoil themselves, they respond to our intent and need and will help. Ask them for healing for yourself and for all beings who need healing.

If you don't believe in spirits, just try to connect to higher forces. It's not a question of believing and not believing. We all have the experience of higher forces. Here we are giving them a name and trying to understand them as they are understood and experienced in the ancient Tibetan traditions. If you focus on and connect with these forces, whatever name you use, you can draw positive qualities from that connection.

Invite the second guests

Connect to the second guests. They are the powerful guardians and protectors of the teachings, gods and goddesses, and the beings that are the stars and planets. Ask them for healing power in order to heal yourself and others. Ask them to remove obstacles and pacify disturbances. Ask that they bless you with their own positive qualities.

Invite the third guests

Connect to the third guests: the eight classes of beings and the karmic guests. These include the spirits related to place—to the mountains, the water, the trees, and the fields. They are the forces you can feel in different locations, that can be beneficent or malevolent. Ask them to support you and to not disturb you. Request that they guide you to the time and place where your energies and qualities were lost, stolen, or damaged. Connect to the spirits who have taken energies from you and ask that they return what they took. Offer them prayers for their well-being.

Invite the fourth guests

Connect to the fourth guests, the guests of compassion. These are the beings weaker than you and beings who, like yourself, suffer the difficulties of daily life, whatever realm they may inhabit. Imagine offering them whatever they need in order to be happy and healthy. Cultivate generosity in your giving. Ask them for help in healing the soul and life-force, and to return the energy they have taken.

The Transformation of the Body

Sing the mantra MA KHAM three, five, or seven times. Immediately, from the infinite distances of vast space, many luminous yellow-golden syllables —MA KHAM—begin to move toward you. They radiate the pure yellow light of the earth element and the light washes over and through you. The syllables gather above your head, above the crown chakra, and then descend. Feel the sensation on your crown as they enter your body. The mo-

MANTRAS OF THE FIVE ELEMENTS

ཨ་སྨུ་ཡེ་ཨ་དཀར་ཨ་ནི་ཨ་	SPACE	A MU YE A KAR A NI A
ཡཾ་ཡཾ་ནི་ལི་ཐུན་འདུ་	AIR	YAM YAM NI LI THUN DU
རཾ་ཚངས་སྟང་ནེ་རཾ་འདུ་	FIRE	RAM TSANG TANG NE RAM DU
མཾ་དང་ར་མཾ་ཏིང་འདུ་	WATER	MAM DANG RA MAM TING DU
ཁཾ་སླ་ཞི་སྐྱེ་སླས་འདུ་	EARTH	KHAM LA ZHI KYE LE DU

MANTRA OF THE FIVE ELEMENTS MANDALA

བྲུཾ་དྲུང་ཟད་སྨུ་ཡེ་འདུ་	DRUM DRUNG DZAD MU YE DU

MANTRA OF ALL THE ELEMENTS COMBINED

ཨ་ཡཾ་རཾ་མཾ་ཁཾ་བྲུཾ་འདུ་	A YAM RAM MAM KHAM DRUM DU

ment they touch the top of your head, your entire body is instantaneously transformed into the Earth Goddess. Visualize this, but more importantly, feel the change.

Your skin, flesh, blood, nerves, channels, bones—all the cells in your body—are transformed into the elemental earth energy. You are earth! In your left hand is a vase full of the healing nectar of the earth element. In your right hand is the counterclockwise swastika representing the changeless, eternal truth. Completely embody the energies and qualities of the Goddess of Earth. Feel her presence, loving and wise, and pray to her to remove any diseases, pain, or afflictions on the level of the body.

Then sing the mantra of the goddess—KHAM LA ZHI KYE LE DU—as you receive her blessings, generating the experience of the positive qualities of the earth element in the body. Feel grounded, strong, capable, steady, and feel that all illnesses, obstacles, and obstructions of the body are removed.

Finally, abide in the transformed state while singing the mantra of all the elements combined: A YAM RAM MAM KHAM BRUM DU. This seals the practice, empowering and stabilizing the experience.

This is the transformation of the body.

There are five parts to the practice, one for each of the elements. This example of the practice is centered on the Earth Goddess. When working with

the other elements and other goddesses, change the particulars—the mantra, color, implements, and organ (see the chart placed after the description of the practice)—and try to feel the qualities of the particular element. Beyond the differences, all the goddesses are enlightened, loving, powerful, and beautiful. They are the pure aspect of the elemental energy that is enlightened and that can respond to you as an individual.

If you wish, you can work with only one of the elements and one of the elemental goddesses in a practice period. Or you can do the practice with each element, one after the other. It may be easiest to begin with the Earth Goddess and then to work with increasingly less substantial elemental energies—water, fire, air, and finally space.

The seed mantras all start with *MA*, the syllable representing female divinity. The sound is related to the mother in many languages: ma, mama, ama. From the *MA* comes the transformation into a goddess. The second syllable is the seed syllable of the element and from it comes the particular qualities of the goddess.

Different texts use different mantras for the elements. *MAM* is sometimes *BAM*, for example. Don't let this confuse you; it's the intent of the practice that is important.

As you generate the positive qualities of the element and receive the blessings of the goddess, recite her mantra: *KHAM LA ZHI KYE LE DU*. There is no fixed number of recitations—sing the mantra as long as it is helpful. Allow the practice to open and soften your heart.

Then abide in the transformed state as you recite the mantra of the combined elements—*A YAM RAM MAM KHAM BRUM DU*—for as long as you are comfortable.

The Transformation of the Energy

You have transformed into the goddess. Again, sing the mantra MA KHAM three, five, or seven times. Keep your mind focused in the spleen. (The organ is in the transformed body. If you cannot feel the organ, focus in the part of the body where the spleen is.) Now visualize and feel the presence of the Earth Goddess in the organ. The goddess situated in the organ is the same luminous yellow goddess into which you have transformed, but smaller. Pray to her, asking her to remove all energetic obstacles and negativities, asking that she cultivate in you the positive qualities of earth.

Use your imagination to make a strong connection to the goddess, to her love and wisdom, as you recite her mantra: KHAM LA ZHI KYE LE DU. Feel that all obstructions and negativities on the level of energy are being removed, all illnesses healed, all mental confusions cleared. As before, in

her left hand is a vase filled with healing nectar, in her right, the counterclockwise swastika. Feel the transformation in the dimension of energy.

Finally, abide in the transformed state as you recite the mantra of the combined elements—A YAM RAM MAM KHAM BRUM DU—for as long as you are comfortable.

This is the transformation of the energetic dimension.

In Tibetan medicine the elements are related to the internal organs. The practice begins with the transformation of the body, and then transforms the more subtle level of energy represented by the organ. Healing the organ is an important part of the practice but because the energetic dimension is what is being worked with, the physical organ is less important than the energy; if you are missing a spleen, or lung, or kidney, work with the area of the body and the sensation. The feeling is as important as the visualization.

With the double organs—lungs and kidneys—visualize a goddess in each. For the elements other than earth, the goddesses in the organs hold different implements than the goddesses into whom you transform yourself. Look at the chart on pages 72-74 for this information.

Retrieving the Elemental Energies

Breathe slowly and deeply. With each exhalation, the goddess in the spleen sends out countless emanations of herself to retrieve the elemental earth essence. They travel through the channels of the body and leave through the right nostril. As they leave, they carry from your body whatever is negative, no longer needed, or toxic and release those things, dissolving them in pure space.

The goddesses travel beyond any limitations of time and space. They travel to the enlightened beings and ask for your healing. They travel to times and scenes in which positive elemental qualities have been lost and retrieve the elemental essence that was lost there. They travel to places of great natural power—where the earth energy is strong and where great masters have practiced—and collect the elemental energies. They travel to beings who have taken the energies from you and they recover what was taken.

The elemental energies are retrieved as pure elemental essence and carried in the vases that each goddess has in her left hand. The goddesses return and enter your body with the inhalation, through the left nostril. They are like bees returning with pollen collected from many flowers. They enter the spleen and pour what they have recovered into the organ, healing it, and into the vase the goddess in the spleen holds. As the organ is healed, imag-

ine all energetic obstacles being cleared. Between the inhalation and the exhalation, hold the breath gently for a few seconds and feel the elemental energies pervade all experience. Then, with the exhalation, the goddesses travel back out through the right nostril and the cycle repeats. With each exhalation goddesses travel outward, with each inhalation goddesses return to you with the elemental essence. Spend time with this, breathing deeply and slowly into and from the spleen, expelling what is negative and accumulating the positive earth energies. Feel the presence of the goddess, loving, wise, and powerful. Feel the changes in your body, energy, and mind.

As the goddesses leave your transformed body through the right nostril, they travel without any restrictions. They go to enlightened beings and ask for healing energy for you. They go to the places and incidents in the past where you know you lost some positive quality connected with the element. In the case of earth, it's where you lost groundedness, strength, steadfastness, confidence, fertility, capability. You needn't try to direct the goddesses or look for such incidents, just let them go. They go into the past of this life and other lives, to the scenes of trauma, loss, terror, or shock. They enter all six realms of existence. They visit areas of great natural potency, taking earth energy from the mountains, the fields, the grasslands, and the deserts.

This is the main part of the practice. If you have time, spend a half-hour to an hour doing just this part of the practice, breathing slowly and deeply, exhaling from the organ, inhaling into the organ, breathing out the negativities, breathing in the positive qualities of the element's essence.

With each visit to a place or time or being, the goddesses recover the elemental essence as healing nectar—luminous, yellow, elemental earth energy (or whichever elemental energy you are working with) gathered in the vases they hold in their left hands. Then they return, entering your transformed body with the inhalation, through the left nostril. They return to the organ and pour the light of the elemental essence into the organ and into the vase of the goddess there. The nectar is a psychic and spiritual medicine that heals even the most subtle levels of your being.

You can use your fingers to block one nostril and then the other but it isn't necessary. Simply visualizing the goddesses leaving from the right nostril and returning through the left is enough. Breathe deeply, with your full attention. Don't be thinking of something else. Make the inhalation slow and deep. The exhalation can be a little stronger. Feel the organ itself doing the breathing and healing in the process. Feel the elemental quality not only in the organ, but also radiating throughout the body, healing body, energy, and mind. With each exhalation more goddesses leave to retrieve

the element. With each inhalation goddesses return, pouring the elemental light they have retrieved into the organ.

The goddesses may go to places unknown to you. As they travel, images or memories may arise. In the West it seems common for traumatic memories to be activated. If this happens to you, just let the goddesses go to the event and retrieve the positive qualities that were lost there as pure elemental energies. Don't be concerned if emotion arises. And don't lose your transformed identity; remain as the powerful and enlightened identity of the goddess and abide in the balance of the sacred elements. If you revisit a traumatic incident, visit with power, strength, and forgiveness as the goddess would, and allow healing to take place.

The goddesses may also go directly to non-physical beings to recover what those beings took from you. This is the traditional way of describing what occurs during the retrieval of the elemental qualities. And they may go to areas of the natural world that have strong elemental energy—the water of the ocean, the fire of a volcano, the air at the top of the highest mountains, the earth of raw land, and the space of the sky. They go to the spirits associated with the elements, the divine forces associated with the elements. You don't need to plan; just let them go freely. Continue to let images arise —they help connect you to specific qualities—but don't hold on. Let them fade away or transform.

Continue until you feel healed.

The Transformation of the Mind

Exhale fully, then inhale deeply. Imagine all the goddesses returning with that inhalation. They enter the organ, pour out the elemental essence they have retrieved, and are absorbed back into the goddess in the organ. Hold the breath for a few moments and feel the elemental energy pervade the body and pervade every element of experience. Repeat this a few times.

Sing the mantra MA KHAM three, five, or seven times. As you do, the goddess in the organ becomes increasingly lively, vivid, and joyful. From the vase in her left hand, she pours the essence of the earth element, in the form of a nectar of pure yellow light, into your crown chakra, into the blue central channel, filling it with luminous earth energy.

Feel the healing nectar flowing into the central channel, from the crown chakra to the bottom of the central channel four finger-widths below the navel. Feel it flowing up and down the central channel, removing even the most subtle obscurations and blockages, and allow yourself to feel increasing peace and bliss. The nectar slowly accumulates in the heart center, and then is integrated into consciousness, into the soul. Develop the experience

as much as possible while chanting the mantra of the goddess: KHAM LA ZHI KYE LE DU. Feel the light in the heart center and in the deepest levels of experience. Feel it integrate with your awareness until awareness and the elemental quality merge completely. Feel that whatever needs healing is healed. Whatever needs to be strengthened is strengthened. Ignorance is dispelled and wisdom manifests, particularly the wisdom of equanimity. The subtle spiritual and mental obscurations are cleared. Use your imagination, your deep breathing.

Then abide in the transformed state as you recite the mantra of the combined elements—A YAM RAM MAM KHAM BRUM DU—for as long as you are comfortable. Feel that all your doubts are resolved and abide in the nature of mind: changeless, with neither beginning nor end, clear, fresh, vivid.

Imagine the positive qualities that have accumulated in the vase of the Earth Goddess in your heart to be the pure healing nectar of the earth element. As you sing the seed syllable of the Goddess three times, she rises up from your heart and pours the golden nectar into your crown chakra. Experience the nectar flowing down through your central channel. The nectar in the central channel is the subtlest dimension of healing.

Feel your deepest doubts clarify; experience the nature of mind: changeless, ceaseless, bright, fresh, vivid. Feel this unbounded, open presence, and merge your mind with the unbounded state. The visualization dissolves into space as your mind dissolves into the natural state. Rest there as long as the experience remains fresh.

From the depth of connection with the natural state, recite the mantra as the self-arising sound of the Goddess. All subtle obstacles to contemplation and all doubts are healed through the power of the mantra and the blessings of the Goddess. Reinforce the power of your meditation with the Long Life Mantra.

Finally, remain in silence in a relaxed, aware state as long as it is fresh. Observe the results of the practice. Abide in pure presence.

In the practice of the retrieval of the elements the healing works from the external, the body; to the energy, the organ; to the central channel; to the heart center; to the soul. In the shamanic view, the soul abides in the heart center in the central channel. The soul is not healed until the energy is brought into the subtlest level of experience. The sign of accomplishment in the practice is that the whole being is affected. The more strongly you can generate the experiences in the practice, the more profound the effects will be.

The Long Life Mantra

LONG LIFE MANTRA
བསྭོ་བྲུཾ་ཨ་དཀར་མུ་ལ་ཏིང་ནམ་འོད་འདུ་མུ་ཡེ་ཚེ་ནི་ཛཿ
SO DRUM A KAR MU LA TING NAM 'OD DU MU YE TSE NI DZA

At the end of the practice, whether you have worked with one element or all five, sing the long-life mantra three, five, seven, or as many times as you wish.

SO DRUM A KAR MU LA TING NAM
‘OD DU MU YE TSE NI DZA
(Pronunciation: so droom a car mu la ting nam o due mu yea tsay nee dza)

This mantra is sung to support healing and long life. It is sung at the end of the practice in order to act as armor, to protect the positive results of the practice. Although mantras cannot be literally translated, often each syllable carries a symbolic meaning. Below are the meanings associated with the syllables of the long-life mantra:

SO empty space
DRUM Long Life Deity’s castle
A KAR unborn wisdom
MU LA seed syllable of yogi
TING NAM nectar
‘*OD DU* receiving long-life force
MU YE prosperity
TSE long life
NI seed syllable of the human realm
DZA light that is the medium for positive qualities

Dedication

At the end of all practices, dedicate the merit to the benefit of all beings. Your motive should always be to help others. Even your own healing should be undertaken with the intention that your increased health and wholeness will enable you to better aid others.

The Goddess Practice with the Other Elements

To work with the other elemental goddesses follow the outline of the above practice, changing the features and qualities particular to each element. This means changing the color, the mantra, the implements, the organ, and particularly the qualities. I summarize the changes in the following chart. The implements in the hands of the goddesses are listed, first the implement in the right hand, then the left. I have also listed an image for each element to suggest a metaphor for the sense of the element.

In the beginning don't worry about what the implements are or any of the other details. Instead, focus on your experience. Generate the positive qualities of the elements and try to make the experience as strong as possible—really feel all this in your body, energy, and mind. Pay attention to the results of the practice. Once you have strong, felt experience, then add the details. Your internal experience is more important than having all the details correct.

Note that when working with the space goddess there is not a second goddess in the associated organ, the heart. Instead, visualize a luminous white *A* [ཨ] radiating light of five colors (yellow, blue, red, green, and white). Because the *A* is already in the heart center, the nectar is not poured into the central channel. It is gathered directly into the heart chakra during the practice, as the many goddesses return with the vases full of the nectar-like elemental space energies.

As I indicated earlier, the most important aspect of the practice is to develop the ability to generate, and to integrate with, the qualities of the elements. There are three stages of transformation in the practice, during each of which you should try to develop the specific qualities of the elements in the dimensions of the body, energy, and mind. When the mantric syllables touch the top of your head and you transform your body into the goddess, generate the feeling of the qualities associated with the element in the body. When evoking the goddess in the organ, feel the energetic qualities of the element pervade the energetic dimension of your experience. When the elemental essence is poured into the central channel, feel the integration of the elemental essence in the most subtle dimension of experience, the dimension of light, as changes in the qualities of consciousness.

As with the earlier practice of internalizing qualities from the natural elements, the progression in this practice moves from gross to subtle. First the body is transformed, then the organ associated with the element. The pure elemental energy heals the organ, then is poured into the central chan-

nel. It then accumulates in the heart center and is integrated with consciousness. The quality of the element is the same during each step of the practice but it is meant to permeate progressively subtler levels of experience, finally integrating into pure consciousness.

If you are particularly working with difficulties in your daily life— relationships, jobs, and so on—add emphasis to the transformation of the body and the generation of the grosser qualities of the element. If working with more energetic problems—disturbances in the emotions, health, or energy —then give emphasis to the evocation of the goddess' presence in the organ and to the generation of the elemental qualities in the energetic dimension. If you are working with obstructions in meditation practice and in your spiritual life, then emphasize the integration of the quality with the mind, when the elemental energies are poured into the central channel.

When the elemental essence is poured into the central channel, try to feel that any obscurations or negative emotions associated with the element are entirely overcome and that the positive qualities are generated. Each element is associated with one of the five wisdoms which dawns when the element is completely purified and integrated.

Element: Earth

Mantra for transformation: *MA KHAM*
Mantra of the goddess: *KHAM LA ZHI KYE LE DU*
Mantra of all the elements combined: *A YAM RAM MAM KHAM BRUM DU*
Color of goddess and syllables: radiant yellow-gold
Organ: spleen
In right and left hands: counterclockwise swastika (unchanging truth) and healing vase
Right and left hands of goddess in the organ: counterclockwise swastika and healing vase
Qualities: strength, steadiness, security, groundedness, focus, connection
Spiritual development: overcoming ignorance, increasing wisdom
Wisdom: wisdom of equanimity
Image: powerful, solid mountains

Element: Water

Mantra for transformation: *A MAM*
Mantra of the goddess: *MAM DANG RA MAM TING DU*
Mantra of all the elements combined: *A YAM RAM MAM KHAM BRUM DU*

Color of goddess and mantra: luminous blue
Organ: kidneys (goddess in each)
In right and left hands: victory banner with crocodile and healing vase
Right and left hands of goddess in the organ: wish-fulfilling jewel and healing vase
Qualities: calm, comfortable, sensuous, relaxed, peaceful, flowing
Spiritual development and wisdom: overcoming jealousy, increasing openness
Wisdom: mirror-like wisdom
Image: vast, calm lake

Element: Fire
Mantra for transformation: *A RAM*
Mantra of the goddess: *RAM TSANG TANG NE RAM DU*
Mantra of all the elements combined: *A YAM RAM MAM KHAM BRUM DU*
Color of goddess and mantra: luminous red
Organ: liver
In right and left hands: lighting bolt and skull
Right and left hands of goddess in the organ: flame and vase
Qualities: energy, warmth, strong will, inspiration, creativity, bliss
Spiritual development: inner fire, overcoming desire and greed, increasing generosity
Wisdom: discriminating wisdom
Image: fiery volcano

Element: Air
Mantra for transformation: *MA YAM*
Mantra of the goddess: *YAM YAM NI LI THUN DU*
Mantra of all the elements combined: *A YAM RAM MAM KHAM BRUM DU*
Color of goddess and mantra: luminous green
Organ: lungs (goddess in each)
In right and left hands: waving wind flag and vase
Right and left hands of goddess in the organ: green air wheel and vase
Qualities: flexibility, liveliness, freshness, quickness
Spiritual development: overcoming pride, increasing peacefulness
Wisdom: all-accomplishing wisdom
Image: fresh wind through the valley and across the mountains

Element: Space
Mantra for transformation: *MA A*
Mantra of the goddess: *A MU YE A KAR A NI A*
Mantra of all the elements combined: *A YAM RAM MAM KHAM BRUM DU*
Color of goddess and mantra: luminous white or clear
Organ: heart
In right and left hands: wish fulfilling jewel and skull filled with red and white seminal essences
Rather than a goddess, in the central channel at the heart level is a luminous white *A* radiating the five pure lights. From this the other goddesses emanate and travel, and to this they return and empty the elemental essence into the heart.
Qualities: spaciousness, ease, clarity, expansiveness, vastness
Spiritual development: overcoming anger, increasing love
Wisdom: wisdom of emptiness
Image: vast open sky over the desert or plains

THE PRACTICE IN DAILY LIFE

It's best to work with all five elements, one after the other, but if that is too much, practice with the element you most feel needs to be strengthened. Try to develop a relationship with the goddesses. The strength of the practice does not depend on perfect visualization or the use of perfect words. What is important is to have an experience of the positive elemental qualities and to learn to use the elements for healing. As the qualities are retrieved, feel your body, energy, and mind becoming stronger and more balanced.

The practice can be done as part of your daily schedule, as a personal or group retreat practice, or at any time that you feel it would be helpful. The text suggests that the practice be done intensively on a retreat of twenty-one, fourteen, or seven days' duration.

According to the text, the individual elements are strongest during particular periods of the day and night. If you wish to augment your practice you can work with each element during the time that it is strongest:

Space:from dawn to sunrise
Fire: from sunrise to midmorning
Earth: from midmorning to midday
Air: from midday to sunset
Water: from sunset until all stars are visible in the night sky

Many centuries ago, it was written in one of the Tibetan texts that the biggest obstacle humans face on the spiritual path is their tendency to be too busy. It's hard to think of the world of yak herders as busy compared with our modern world in which there are jobs and cars and paperwork, e-mail and phones and faxes, televisions and shopping centers and newspapers. But it is our nature to fill time, to fill in the spaces in our lives, and then to complain that we have too much to do. For some, adding spiritual practice to life seems to be just another thing that we have to fit into our schedules. But it doesn't have to be like that.

As long as we breathe, we can practice. If nothing else, we can inhale what is positive and exhale what is harmful. We can remain mindful and practice kindness and compassion. These take no time away from anything else. Similarly, we can practice with the elements at any time, in any place.

If you're out of balance, call on the energy of the element that is needed to rebalance. Before meals, offer the food to the first and second guests. Offer the leftovers to the third and fourth guests. Spend time feeling connected to the grounded earth, and maybe the next day to the spacious sky. Stay connected for a week to the comfort of water or the flexibility of air or the creativity of fire.

The elements can be approached in nature or through visionary connection to the elemental goddesses. When the connection is firm and the experience of the elements is vivid, there are endless possibilities for healing and generating positive qualities, for overcoming negativities and obstacles, and for progressing on the spiritual path.

THREE

THE FIVE ELEMENTS IN TANTRA

In tantra, the focus on the elements is mainly in terms of their manifestation as the vital energies in the body. They are not reduced to biological or psychic energies, though both these energies are manifestations of them.

The elements are understood to be the sacred, fundamental energies of existence encountered in the energetic dimension of the individual. Rather than being accessed through the raw natural elements or through relationships with non-physical beings, as in the shamanic tradition, the elemental energies are accessed in the practitioner's own body as the channels, pranic energies, seminal essences, and sacred seed syllables of the energy body. In tantra, these practices lead ultimately to the accomplishment of the body of the deity, which is not a goal in shamanism.

The shamanic view, however, is not excluded from tantra. The Mother Tantra, for example, says that if a person seems to be possessed consistently by one strong emotion, it is likely that the person is beset by demonic forces. If the person intermittently experiences the negative emotion, this is probably due to an energetic imbalance. When the person is not affected by negative emotions, it means that the different elemental energies are balanced. In Tibetan traditions, shamanic and tantric practices and teachings are comfortably integrated with each other.

Tantra is the path of transformation. The five negative emotions—correlated to the five elements—are transformed into five positive qualities: anger into love, greed into generosity, jealousy into openness, pride into peace, and ignorance into wisdom. The suffering being is transformed into the enlightened buddha. Even the physical body is transformed into a body formed of light.

Tantric practice is broadly divided into two levels of practice: the generation stage practices and the completion stage practices. The practices I am describing here are from the latter, which generally have to do with

yogas involving the body. To understand these practices it is necessary to have some understanding of the energetic anatomy of the body.

THE HORSE, PATH, RIDER, AND ARMOR

The metaphor of the horse, path, rider, and armor, found in the Mother Tantra, helps us understand the components of the practice and the relationships between them. The horse is the prana (lung). The path represents the channels in the body *(tsa).* The rider is the sphere (*tigle*; Skt: *bindu),* the mind or consciousness aspect. And the armor is the syllable *(yi ge)* or symbol.

THE HORSE: PRANA

The Tibetan word for the vital energy is *lung*, but I will use the widely known Sanskrit word, prana. Prana is the energy that powers and is the substance of all things material and immaterial. It is the fundamental energy from which all things arise, the energy of the kunzhi, the basis of existence. At its most subtle level it is undifferentiated, non-localized, and non-dual. Its first discrimination is into the five pure lights of the elements, which are too subtle for us to perceive with our ordinary minds. However, we can sense prana directly at the grosser levels in the air we breathe. We can also sense its flow in our bodies. It is at this level, in which prana can be felt both in its movement and its effects, that we work in tantra. We become sensitive to and develop the flow of prana using mind, imagination, breathing, posture, and movement. By guiding the grosser manifestations of prana, we can affect more subtle levels. As our sensitivity increases, we can directly experience prana in subtler dimensions.

Prana, in general, is related to the air element. This is the element closest to space, the first to arise from space, and the last to dissolve into the base at death. It pervades everything and everywhere. When we talk about the five elements as five pranas, we are talking about the fire and air aspects of each of the elements. As I wrote earlier, one formulation of the elements in the body has the flesh as earth, the blood as water, the metabolic heat as fire, the breath as air, and the consciousness as space. This is thinking of the elements in their earthier aspect–the more substantial, more physical aspect of the manifestation of the elements in the body. The five pranic energies are the airy, less substantial manifestations of the elemental energies in the body.

THE FUNCTIONS OF THE FIVE PRANAS

The five primary energy flows in the body are: the upward-moving prana,

related to earth; the life-force prana, related to space; the fire-like prana, related to fire; the pervasive prana, related to air; and the downward-moving prana, related to water.

Upward-moving prana

The upward-moving prana activates the senses: it allows us to see, hear, smell, taste, and feel through touch. It is also the energy underlying thought and cognition. A defect in the senses is often related to a weakness in the upward-moving prana. Many people who have done these practices have told me that they notice improvements in memory and vision. The upward-moving prana is related to the earth element—which may seem counter-intuitive. But besides activating the senses, this prana also vitalizes the brain, the earthy aspect of the senses and cognition. Because the five elements underlie everything that exists, there are apparent contradictions when looking at more than one level of what is manifest.

An image is associated with each of the five types of prana, either relating to the concentration or function of the energy in the body or representing qualities of the prana. The image connected to the upward-moving prana is shaped like an umbrella. The pranic energy is strong in the throat chakra, and rises up and spreads out through the brain, making the umbrella-like shape. It is yellow, symbolizing the earth element.

The upward-moving prana opens the throat and crown chakras as well as the central channel. For this reason it is particularly related to spiritual experience. Without an opening of the upper chakras and the central channel, higher spiritual experience is not supported by the body. Opening the crown chakra is related to strong experiences of bliss, while opening the throat chakra is related to peace. Traditionally, the ultimate external sign of connection to and integration of the upward-moving prana is the ability to jump very high and to fly. Internally, the sign of full integration is the ability to rise above negative emotions and enter upper realms.

Life-force prana

The life-force prana is concentrated in the heart. It is the vitality of the person. When the life-force prana is weak, the individual is frail. When it is absent, death results. When it is strong, the person is vital, the will is strong, and experience is vivid.

The image associated with the life-force prana is the white or clear wish-fulfilling jewel centered in the heart. In old Tibetan stories, prayers to the wish-fulfilling jewel result in desires being met—that which is in the heart

becomes manifest in life. The heart and life-force prana are associated with the space element. When the life-force prana is strong and the heart chakra is open, there are vivid experiences of clarity and vitality. When this prana is deficient, the memory grows weak and the mind is clouded. The life-force prana manifests negatively as anger and hatred; positively as strong will, happiness, joy, and the development of wisdom. It supports vitality in life, cognitive functioning, and perception.

Traditionally, the ultimate sign of integration with the space element is the ability to transfer consciousness into other bodies. This ability has resulted in many stories of masters who, facing death and unwilling to give up serving others, locate the body of a recently dead young person and transfer the consciousness into it. Upon reviving the younger body, the masters continue their work without loss of the memories that originated in the older, now abandoned, body.

Fire-like prana

Fire-like prana is the energy of metabolism. It digests food and is strengthened by the digestion of food. It controls the process of drawing nutrition from what is eaten. It is centered in the navel chakra and is responsible for the heat of the body. The image associated with it is a red triangle, point up, in the navel chakra.

The fire in the navel chakra is developed in practices like tummo—the yoga of inner fire. When refined it is the basis of subtle psychic heat, which is associated with bliss. There are many kinds of bliss; the fire prana is related particularly to meditative bliss, to the joy of being. This is a joy not dependent on anything. It does not disappear if a job is lost, it does not increase if a promotion is earned. It is the bliss of awareness, of sensation, of existence.

A deficiency of fire prana manifests as ignorance, sleepiness, dullness, forgetfulness, poor digestion, or a lack of energy. The sign of an ultimate connection to fire is an invulnerability to destruction by the elements and the ability to develop dream yoga–self-awareness in the dream state–and the practice of the clear light.

Pervasive prana

Pervasive prana moves throughout the body. It is connected to the air element. Because it is everywhere in the body, there is no specific image that reflects its concentration.

Pervasive prana is responsible for communication inside the body; it connects the different parts of the body energetically. Nutrition moves from the intestines to the rest of the body; blood flows; nerves carry information.

Touch any place on the skin and there is sensation. More subtly, focus the mind on any part of the body and there is sensation. This is all the work of the pervasive prana.

Strong pervasive prana allows for the extension of experience, positive and negative. If we see a beautiful flower and feel the pleasure of that throughout our bodies, that is the pervasive prana. When we feel love in our hearts and it manifests in the expression on our faces, it is the pervasive prana that connects heart and face. If we feel good and share that with our friends, that is positive pervasive prana. If we feel bad and dump that bad experience on someone else and make them feel bad, that can be a negative manifestation of pervasive prana. Pervasive prana manifests negatively as jealousy and the wish to harm others; positively it produces a fast, sharp intellect.

Pervasive prana allows the effects of meditation and other spiritual practices to spread throughout life. Without it, we may have good experiences but they remain isolated. When most developed, pervasive prana can bridge time and space. For example, when a strong practitioner consciously chooses an incarnation after death, it is the power of the pervasive prana that allows the connection from this life to the next.

The ultimate signs of integration with the air element are the abilities to transform the body, to be present in more than one place at a time, and to have clairvoyance. Development of the pervasive prana supports the direct perception of emptiness and is the pranic basis of bliss.

Downward-moving prana

Downward-moving prana is connected to water. On a mundane level, it is the energy behind orgasm, urination, bowel movement, and erection. When it is deficient all these functions can be impaired. It also allows us to eliminate what we don't want in other areas of our lives. It is represented as a bellows that can push energy down, concentrated in the secret chakra behind the sexual organ.

Negatively, downward-moving prana manifests as attachment and lust. Positively, it supports being grounded and stable. Its higher function is to generate bliss in sex; when it is cultivated and integrated, it provides the ability to receive yogic power through tantric sexual union. Through it one is able to experience the union of bliss and emptiness, the foundation of tantric practice.

THE PATH: CHANNELS

Prana moves through the body in channels. There are said to be 84,000

channels in the body—or, alternatively, 360,000—categorized as gross, subtle, or very subtle. The gross channels are blood vessels, nerves, and the lymph system. The subtle channels are not substantial but are energetic, like the meridians of the energetic circulation system recognized in acupuncture. Very subtle channels are the paths of the very subtle prana. They cannot be detected or measured, but can be experienced directly by the naturally sensitive and by yogic practitioners who develop the necessary sensitivity.

Sometimes when I teach I use the metaphor of a house to explain the relationship of the prana and the channels: The house is the body. The channels are the wires in the house that carry the electricity. The electricity is the prana. The light bulbs are the senses. The appliances are the mechanical functions of the body. If the prana is deficient, the bulbs will not light or will be lit only dimly. The senses won't work fully, or the mechanical functions of the body will be defective, or the thoughts will be unclear. If the channels are broken or damaged, the results will be the same.

Although I use this analogy, it is a mistake to think of the subtle and very subtle channels as substantial conduits through which the prana flows. To imagine them in a way that is closest to their actual nature, imagine them as paths of light, a network of light that permeates every cell of the body. Some of the channels are stronger and brighter, some are smaller and dimmer.

There are three main channels used in many of the yogic practices: the central channel and the two side channels. They were described in the directions for the purification breathing in the section on shamanism We visualize them in order to connect with the prana moving through them. Though the visualization is only a symbolic image, it directs our attention to the energy that is actually present in the body. I'll repeat the description of the three channels here: The central channel is blue and rises straight through the center of the body, beginning about four finger-widths below the navel; it is the width of a thick fountain pen, and widens slightly from the heart to its opening at the crown of the head. The side channels have the diameter of pencils and join the central channel at its base below the navel, in the center of the body. They rise straight through the body on either side of the central channel, curve around under the skull, pass down behind the eyes, and open at the nostrils. In women the right channel is symbolized as red and the left as white. In men the right channel is white and the left is red.

Ordinarily prana flows strongly in the side channels. This is the karmic prana. It can be positive, negative, or neutral, and underlies all normal dualistic experiences, which are also positive, negative, or neutral. There are various kinds of karmic prana—in this book we are concerned with the five primary pranas that I described earlier.

The central channel is very subtle. In it flows the prana that is the energetic aspect of the non-dual awareness, rigpa. When the nature of reality is described in terms of two inseparable aspects—form and emptiness, bliss and emptiness, or awareness and emptiness—it is the central channel that represents the experience of the inseparability of the two aspects of the apparent duality.

In the yogic practices of the subtle winds and channels, which are described in detail a little later, the intention is to open the major chakras and bring the prana from the side channels into the central channel. Doing this coincides with the mind releasing dualistic misperceptions and abiding in the non-dual awareness of rigpa. This is why, in the retrieval of the elements, the recovered energies are poured into the central channel. When the prana abides in the central channel, the practitioner can abide in the nature of mind. The prana and the mind always move together; there is no mind without prana.

THE RIDER: *TIGLE*

In many tantric practices, a tigle (*thig le*) is visualized. Tigle literally means "sphere" or "circle," and this is what is visualized in the practices: a sphere of light either sitting in a chakra or moving through the channels. Tigle represents the mind aspect of experience. It is the rider of the pranic horse. There is a metaphor in the teaching related to the relationship between the mind and the prana: the mind is a lame rider, the prana a blind horse. Without the mind, the prana has no direction. Without the prana, the mind has no capacity to move. They function as a unit.

A visualized tigle may represent consciousness or a quality of consciousness or both. For example, a tigle in the heart may represent compassion; a tigle moving up the central channel may represent non-dual awareness; a tigle ejected from the crown of the head may represent the person that leaves the body at death; and so on. In sleep yoga, for another example, five tigle are visualized in the heart, representing the five goddesses of the pure elemental essences, the five pure lights. In this practice the visualization is only of spheres of light representing qualities integrated with awareness.

THE ARMOR: SYLLABLES

In Tibetan practices the visualization of syllables is common. Syllables have more form than the pure light of the tigle and represent more distinct qualities. Syllables, buddhas, deities, or goddesses are often visualized inside of the tigle. They are similar in meaning and function, and every deity in tantra

is connected with a "seed" syllable from which it manifests and into which it dissolves. For example, *A* can represent Kuntuzangpo, the *dharmakaya* buddha. *OM* or *HUNG* can represent a *sambhogakaya* buddha such as Shenla Odkar. *HUNG* can represent a *nirmanakaya* buddha such as like Tonpa Shenrab or Yeshe Walmo. These buddhas are characterized by specific qualities and manifest with particular purposes. This particularity is represented by the syllable. By "represent" I mean that the syllable has the same energetic qualities as the deity.

The syllable is the rider's (the mind's) armor. The mind focuses on a particular syllable in order to evoke a particular quality, bringing the quality into felt experience. The experience is already in the mind in potential and the symbol calls it forth and protects the mind from straying. When the syllable is strongly visualized and the quality it represents brought into felt experience, the syllable is imbued with power and protects the practitioner from non-physical negative beings encountered on the visionary, energetic levels of experience. It is non-physical power; non-physical beings encountering it will avoid it. Negative forces can only affect us if they find a weakness or vulnerability through which they can harm us. The activated syllable or other symbol brings the strength of the quality it represents into experience, replacing weakness and vulnerability.

In Western psychological terms, it could be said that when one is fully engaged with the syllable and the quality that it represents, one is protected from one's own negative states—depression, anxiety, and so on. However the mechanism is described, the syllable functions as armor in the war of negative emotions, in the battles led by the forces of ignorance. Without armor, in this kind of battle, one becomes not a victim of the war but the war itself. That is how the samsaric war is lost—by becoming it.

ASPECTS OF TANTRA

CHAKRAS

Chakra *(khor lo)* means "wheel." Chakras are probably the most well-known aspect of energetic anatomy in the West, where they are often used as metaphors for psychological or spiritual growth. But chakras are not only metaphors, they are actual energetic centers in the body. A chakra is simply a location in the body at which channels cross. As there are thousands of channels, there are many, many chakras. However in spiritual and yogic practice the focus is on the major chakras, the sites where many channels or major channels cross. If we imagine many channels intersecting—the chan-

nels radiating out from the intersection—it is easy to understand why chakras are represented as spoked wheels or as a wheel-like shape made by the petals of a lotus.

Many tantric practices require the practitioner to fix his or her attention in particular chakras. Because prana and mind always move together, directing the attention directs prana; the movement of prana cannot be divided from experience. As the pranic centers in the body, the chakras—in particular the six main ones—influence the quality of experience. Each of these chakras are linked to the experiential qualities of one of the six realms of existence.

To use a modern analogy, the main chakras are like hard drives, one for each of the main realms of experience. Each hard drive has many files. As long as a chakra is functioning—and it always is to some extent, no matter how "closed" it may be—one of these files is open. What is displayed by that file shapes experience. In sleep, for example, if we do not remain aware, the mind and prana are directed by karmic habit to move to one of the chakras, which means that the attention becomes rooted in different energetic locations in the body. As it does, particular types of characteristic experience arise which determine the character of the dream. When the mind's focus moves to another chakra, the dream changes. This normally happens without our conscious direction unless we are able to guide dreams.

In the yogic practices of the channels and prana, we open the channels so that the prana can move without obstruction. We open the chakras and evoke positive experiences associated with that chakra. In the hard drive analogy, we clear the screen and then call up the file that contains the positive, supportive qualities that we need for the practice. The tigle is the mental aspect, the consciousness that is focused there that takes on the quality that is evoked in the chakra, as a crystal ball takes on the color of fabric that it rests upon. The syllable is both the password that evokes the quality and the armor that sustains it.

POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE

The positive and negative manifestations of the elements are experienced in the body. Pleasure and discomfort, dullness and agitation, fatigue and vitality, stress and relaxation, happiness and misery—the experience of these is always rooted in bodily sensation. This doesn't mean that the mind is completely controlled by physical states or that the mind cannot transform negativity; rather it indicates that a transformation of experience from negative into positive or positive into negative always includes a change in the

quality of bodily experience. This is one reason that tantra focuses on the body as a basis for spiritual growth. It is also why tantra can contribute a great deal to the quality of life, to creating more health, pleasure, and satisfaction as a fortunate benefit of progressing on the spiritual path.

In sutra the nature of reality is described in terms of the inseparable union of emptiness and form or emptiness and vision. In Dzogchen, it is awareness and emptiness. In tantra, it is bliss and emptiness. Bliss, though not confined to physical sensation, is based in sensation.

Tantra includes sexual practices that utilize the bliss of sexual experience. This has resulted in a misunderstanding in the West that tantra is defined by sexual practices. But tantra goes far beyond sexual practices. It is based on the understanding and realization of emptiness, the fundamental nature of all phenomena. Without understanding that bliss is empty, practices involving bliss are not tantric and the labeling of such practices as tantra is misleading.

In fact, tantra does not require sexual practice. Tantric practice is meant to transform all experience into bliss: all feelings in the body into bliss, all external vision into blissful vision of the pure lands, all perception of other beings into perception of buddhas, all sounds into sacred mantras. The practices are not about pretense. Practice leads to control over perception and cognition, and freedom from negative conditioning. The true situation of things is modeled in the imagination and developed in experience in order to overcome perceptual and cognitive distortion. The real situation is fully realized only when the practitioner stabilizes in the nature of mind. A buddha of compassion, love, and openness can manifest in the heart chakra, as can a demon of anger and jealousy. All of us have positive and negative experiences. The question is, which do you go toward? With which are you most familiar? What grabs your attention without your consent? What thoughts dominate you? It may be that you are surrounded by the positive but you don't see any of it. Instead you see all the reasons you should be depressed or angry or disappointed. How you see determines what you see and what you feel.

Tantric practice is particularly appropriate for working with the arising of negative experience—but one must neither activate nor support the negative behavior. If an angry thought arises and we react with strong aversion — "Oh, what a bad thought!"—we have not resolved anything. But if we let the negative thought arise and dissolve in awareness with neither grasping or aversion, or we use the event as a reminder to come back to a practice—mindfulness, mantra recitation, visualization, or so on—then we are not supporting the conditioning that leads to the manifestation of

the negative thought. We are undercutting it and weakening the karma that supports it.

When a negative emotion arises, its nature is quite pure. It is energy, an experience in the body and the mind. That's all. It's not substantial. And it is fleeting unless supported. It is a shimmer of light and will transform by itself. Even confusion is clear in its nature; it's only when we have a problem with the problem—and either grasp at it and continue with it or fight with it and try to push it away—that the negativity is supported. Left alone, it dissolves, it self-liberates.

SUPPORTING POSITIVE QUALITIES

We do practices to clear the channels and open the chakras. Then, in that opening, we generate positive qualities. If we don't know how to protect the space and generate positive qualities, whatever habitually characterizes our experience will return.

If we abide in non-dual awareness, there is no need for protection because we are beyond good and bad, beyond positive and negative. But if we abide in duality, positive and negative arise in us as habitual experiences. Enemies are usually our own creation, based on our own habitual ways of seeing.

If we pay attention to how much support we have in life, we find more and more. We can dislike our neighbor or we can realize that having a neighbor supports our safety and our sense of community. There's a great deal supporting us but too often it is overlooked. An entire world structure supports us by growing food, getting it to us, and providing medical care, physical protection, buildings, roads, and schools. We may not like all of it, but if we see nothing but problems, problems are everywhere we look. We become like the media, where only bad news is considered to be newsworthy.

If we are affected like this, it's because we are not protected. Positive symbols protect the mind: sacred images we keep in our houses, the practice beads *(mala)* we carry, the prayers or mantras we recite. These keep the mind turned to the sacred. This is what I mean by protection.

It is not unusual to carry a photograph of someone close who has died. Like the syllables or the images of deities, the photograph can be a support for experience. In this case, the photo supports the experience of grief. Of course this isn't to say that we shouldn't grieve—we should. It is a natural and necessary part of life. But it isn't good to support the experience past the point where it is appropriate. Death is the inevitable consequence of life, but sometimes the person left behind never recovers while the person who died has already gone on.

We know how to support the negative. When something bad happens, we keep repeating the story. Gossip. Scandals. These stories get told again and again. Of course we're interested in scandals, corruption, wars, and so on. I'm not suggesting that we pretend we are in a paradise, beyond suffering. We're in samsara, the realm of suffering. But I am suggesting we use symbols to keep the mind turned more toward the sacred than toward the negative. When we feel weak, scattered, and tired, we are easy targets for negative internal and external forces. Someone can say one word and we spiral into anger or distress. We're more vulnerable to illness, to depression, to negative forces in general. All this may be because our prana is weak or our minds are holding a negative symbol. We may be repeating, "It's all meaningless. The world is a mess and so am I." We may be reading about the latest atrocity, watching the newest movie about serial killers, remembering every wrong done to us in the last week. This is how we hold on to negative symbols, images, and thoughts. When we do this, we are not connected to the pure mind, the natural state. We have become the war of samsara.

The yogic practices of the channels and prana protect us by giving us experiences of bliss, clarity, stability, peace, and comfort. When the energy is moving smoothly in our bodies and the chakras are open, everything functions better in us and in our experience. We are naturally more positive. We see more possibilities and have more energy to overcome obstacles. Well-being is itself a kind of protection. Modern medicine recognizes that stress causes many illnesses to manifest. In the same way, being content and comfortable in our bodies helps to prevent illness, and spiritual practice guards against the attack of both inner and outer negative forces.

Here is an example of an informal practice that works with the chakras, tigles, and syllables. It can be done anytime and any place.

Bön and Buddhism recognize six realms of cyclic existence. We have the seeds of existence in each of the six realms inside of us, stored as possibilities—karmic traces—that will come to fruition when circumstances are appropriate. The karmic traces are associated with particular negative emotions and particular chakras: the hell realms with hatred and anger and with chakras in the center of the soles of the feet; the realm of the hungry ghosts with greed and with the secret chakra that is just behind the genitals; the animal realm with ignorance and the navel chakra; the human realm with jealousy and the heart chakra; the demi-gods or *asuras* with pride or arrogance and the throat chakra; and the god realms with pleasurable distraction and the crown chakra.

There are complex practices—such as the Practice of the Six Lokas—undertaken to purify the karmic traces that lead to rebirth in the different

realms. But for this practice, we are trying to purify the negative emotions connected with each chakra and to then cultivate the positive emotions that are also related to the chakra.

Each chakra has different experiences related to it. Even with no specific preparation these can be experienced to some extent by putting the attention in different areas. Try placing your attention in the crown, then in the secret chakra behind the sexual organ, then in the throat, then in the navel, then in the heart area. Note the different qualities of experience that arise.

Now visualize the syllable *A* [ཨ] in each chakra. Just as a buddha can appear in each realm of existence, even the lowest realms of hell, the clear buddha-nature is inherent in all experience, even negative emotions like hatred and greed. *A* represents the pure basis of all experience, inseparable emptiness and luminosity. The syllable is visualized in each of the six major chakras in order to keep the connection to the buddha-nature in every dimension of experience.

When putting the attention of the mind on a chakra, it is usual to visualize a tigle there, a sphere of light. The tigle represents the quality of consciousness we are trying to cultivate, for example compassion in the crown chakra (see table below). Visualizing the *A* inside the tigle acts as armor. It isn't just that there is a space for experience; it more that the experience is connected to what is represented by the *A*, which is the nature of ultimate reality. The syllable protects and reminds us to stay connected to the true nature. As long as it is kept there by the power of mindfulness, as long as the awareness stays connected to the base, connected to the natural mind, the negative conditioning cannot reassert itself.

When you are connected to the quality most associated with a chakra, using mindfulness to maintain the syllable in the chakra stabilizes the experience of that quality. Then the quality you are cultivating can be constant through all experiences.

Use your imagination as fully as possible while doing this practice. Pay attention to the sensual aspects of the practice. Feel the channels becoming unblocked, the chakras opening, the prana moving smoothly throughout the body.

It may be that a negative emotion arises while you're doing the practice. That's all right. Let it arise and fade away. Don't hold on to it and don't repress it. When the emotion dissolves, integrate awareness with the space in which it dissolved. What is there? Space. The empty essence. The base. Recognize the fact that space and awareness are integrated, are inseparable. But don't do this just intellectually—become that inseparability of emptiness

CORRELATION OF CHAKRAS WITH QUALITIES AND REALMS			
Chakra	**Negative Emotion**	**Positive Quality**	**Realm**
Crown	Pleasurable Distraction	Compassion	God *(Deva)*
Throat	Pride	Peacefulness/ Humility	Demi-god *(Asura)*
Heart	Jealousy	Openness	Human
Navel	Ignorance	Wisdom/Clarity	Animal
Secret	Greed	Generosity	Hungry-ghost *(Preta)*
Soles of the Feet	Hatred/Anger	Love	Hell

and awareness. When you are present in awareness and not fixed on something arising in space, there is a great spaciousness. This is the experience of the opening. In the space of the opening, develop the positive qualities.

It may be easier in the beginning to do this practice in a shrine room or a beautiful place in nature, perhaps even with a group. The more support there is, the easier it is to do practice. When practice becomes difficult, find that which supports the positive qualities and intentions.

Use the table above as a basis for practice. If you are working on developing a certain quality—let's say clarity—focus on the associated chakra, the navel chakra. The same is true if you are trying to overcome a negative quality—let's say pride and arrogance. In this case, visualize the throat chakra. Visualize a luminous sphere of light at the point of the chakra, and in the center of that sphere, a radiant *A*. You can visualize the chakras all at once or one after another, or you can work with only one for as long as you wish, days or even weeks. You must find what works for you, so experiment.

THE PRACTICE OF TSA LUNG

The following practices are not difficult but they should be done correctly. The correct posture and use of the breath are important. Although it is easy

to simply explain *how* to do the physical movements, it is more helpful to explain *why* so that the understanding can be applied to other practices.

POSTURE

Almost everyone thinks of meditation as something to do sitting on the ground with legs crossed. Tibetans practice this way as do the followers of Zen, Theravada, and Hinduism. But why? It isn't just due to a shortage of chairs. There are good reasons to sit this way.

The posture is taught in terms of five points. The first is to cross the legs to keep the pranic energy circulating back to the trunk of the body, to the secret chakra. This promotes the generation of subtle internal heat. The second is to fold the hands in the position of equipoise, one upon the other in the lap. In our tradition both hands are palm up, the left hand resting on top of the right. The hands are tucked against the low belly, at the level of the chakra, four finger-widths below the navel. Like the crossed-legs, this keeps the energy from being dispersed. The third is to keep the spine straight, not hyper-extended or rigid or slumped or bent. This keeps the channels, particularly the three main ones, straight and open so that the prana can flow smoothly and easily. The fourth is to pull the jaw slightly down and in, which lengthens the back of the neck and helps quiet thought. The fifth point is to keep the chest open, which aids breathing and helps open the heart chakra.

To really discover the meaning in all this, pay attention to your own experience. When you arrange your body in meditation posture, how does it affect you? When you straighten your back, what happens to your thoughts and emotions? Does keeping your gaze upward during meditation generate a different experience then when the gaze looks down? Knowing what to pay attention to internally helps to develop the experience and the benefits of the practice.

BREATH AND PRANA

Spiritual and yogic traditions around the world use the breath. Not only does it bring us the oxygen we need to live and rid us of waste produced by metabolic activity, it also revitalizes us with subtle pranic energies. It is the focus of attention in many meditative traditions and is manipulated in most yogic practices. Just as the physical body is a gross form of light, the breath is a gross form of prana that we can guide in our body. Working with the breath, we guide the subtler levels of prana that move beneath or inside the breath.

In the following practices, the breath is divided into four parts: inhaling, re-inhaling, holding, exhaling.

Inhaling

When inhaling during the practice, open the body fully. Feel that you are welcoming, accepting with joy, what enters. Imagine the person you love most in the world coming to your front door after an absence; that is the feeling to bring to the inhalation. Invite, welcome, appreciate.

Re-inhaling

After inhaling, hold the breath for a moment, and then "re-inhale." What I mean by this is that you inhale again without exhaling first, thus filling up the remaining capacity of the lungs. We rarely inhale to the fullest extent; re-inhaling completes the inhalation. When re-inhaling, try to experience the body filling with spiritual nectar, with blessings, with bliss that radiates from the breath and pervades the body.

Holding

After completing the inhalation, hold the breath for the duration of the exercise. Holding the breath is meant to generate internal heat, internal energy, internal fire. Feel this fire, imagine the heat moving throughout the body.

In four of the following five exercises (in the section on the Five External Tsa Lung Practices) the breath is to be held in a particular part of the body. Holding the breath in an area is a way to keep the attention there, to direct the prana and concentrate it in one of the chakras. Each of the chakras is associated with particular qualities of experience. When the breath is held in the area of a chakra and then released, that quality is being activated. That is, by opening the chakra with the breath, the associated quality is being energetically supported.

Exhalation

With the exhalation, allow whatever negative energy or stress you are experiencing in the moment to be released. It leaves your body, your mind, and your energy. Exhale whatever hurts you or no longer serves you.

As a preliminary practice you can spend some time breathing according to these instructions without doing anything else. Inhale with a sense of opening the body, energy, and mind and with a sense of welcoming and joy. Re-inhale and fill with a bliss that pervades the body. Hold the breath and

generate internal fire that supports the experience of bliss and burns away obstructions and defilements. Purify by exhaling all negativities and obscurations as smoke-colored air.

Keeping the attention on the breath will make the practices more complete and more effective.

TRANSFORMATION IN HOLDING AND RELEASING

The body is constantly engaged in taking in, holding, and releasing. This is true concerning food, air, prana, knowledge, and experience.

Whenever there is a release of physical substances from the body, there is relaxation and opening. If we cry after holding back tears, we relax. This is not just a physical effect; the sadness or whatever emotion is also released. A space opens in experience. We can forget it or we can utilize it for practice. When the sadness is released, there is a subtle joy in the relaxation that ensues. Find that joy and sustain it.

Even when we go to the toilet there is a positive effect that we usually don't think about. For example, remember a time when you were in a crowd or someplace in the city and you very much needed to go to the bathroom. And maybe you finally found a toilet, but there was a long, slow line. And finally you reached the toilet. There was a release, a small experience of liberation or of freedom from tension. Even though this is only an evacuation of waste products from the body, there is a change in the quality of experience, an opening and release. Understanding how to apply all experience to the path of meditation, you can use such moments. Bring them into awareness, recognize them, learn from them, and use them.

In tantric sexual practices, the holding and releasing, tension and relaxation, build-up and orgasm, are used the same way. When there is a great release, there is the opportunity for great joy. Tensions dissipate, the body relaxes. Let the mind relax, too, but not into drowsiness; let it dissolve into pure awareness.

This practice isn't only about relaxation, though many people meditate in order to release tensions. Doing this is all right, but it's not a deep use of meditation. To take the practice further, look for the space after release and inhabit it fully with awareness. When we understand this principle, we can apply it to every breath. Every exhalation is an entry into the natural state of mind. Every inhalation is an opportunity to develop positive qualities.

In ordinary life, release is sometimes violent or destructive. Anger can be released by breaking glass or yelling, through fighting or hateful thoughts. Althought this may release the tension of anger, it is not very skillful. Be-

haviors like these reinforce the anger and strengthen the conditioning that will result in further expressions of anger.

Really knowing how to practice means transforming negative experience into the path. Every negative experience allows for some kind of release into a more spacious experience. Use your knowledge.

INSTRUCTIONS

There are three levels, or three versions, of this tsa lung practice: external, internal, and secret. The external is grosser—it uses stronger physical movements that make the breath stronger. The inner and secret are progressively less physically oriented. The external is more about the body; the internal, about energy and prana; the secret, about mind or awareness.

Before any practice, do the nine-breath purification as explained in the section on shamanism. If you know how, perform the Guru Yoga, take refuge, and generate the motivation to practice for the benefit of all beings. At the end of any practice, dedicate the benefit and merit from the practice to the welfare of all beings. This is how to keep the practice aligned with the path to enlightenment.

The morning is a good time for these practices. Do each of them five times, three times, or even once. The practices can be done with the eyes open or closed—experiment. The goal is to do the practices while abiding in non-dual awareness.

THE FIVE EXTERNAL TSA LUNG MOVEMENTS

The breathing

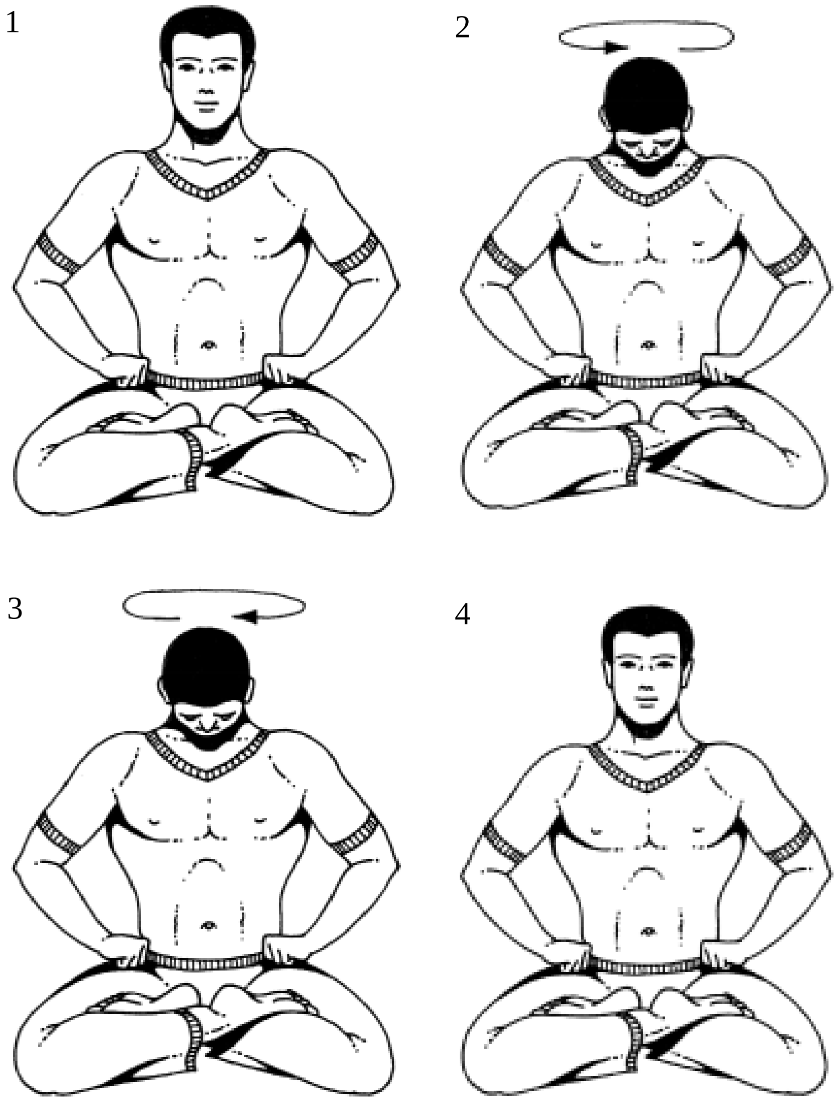
Inhale with a sense of welcoming. Breathe in all positive and healing qualities, especially any you lack. Hold the breath just for a moment, then re-inhale—fill the rest of the lungs' capacity—and hold the breath. With the exhalation, all negative qualities and illnesses are expelled.

Upward-moving prana

This practice is related to the earth element.

Inhale and hold the air in the throat chakra, concentrating there. Allow the throat to swell with the held breath. Re-inhale, filling the lungs completely. While holding the breath, gently tilt your head down and forward and then slowly rotate your head five times counterclockwise, rolling the head over the shoulder, across the upper back, over the next shoulder, and

Upward-moving prana



again down and forward. Be careful with your neck. Don't strain or overextend. If there is any pain, use very small, gentle circles, keeping your jaw facing forward. Feel the vital air moving up from the throat chakra and through your head in a spiral, vitalizing the brain and the senses and activating the crown chakra. The crown chakra is associated with the white tigle and with bliss in tantric practice, so pay attention to increased blissful feelings in the body. Still holding the breath, rotate the head five times clockwise. This makes a total of ten revolutions of the head during one breath, five in each direction.

When you finish with the rotations, exhale, imagining the breath and energy moving up the central channel from the throat, spreading out through the brain and then out the top of the head. As the breath moves through the brain, imagine it vitalizing and healing the senses and the brain functions and activating all spiritual capacities related to the throat and crown chakras. It is only in the first exercise that the exhalation is through the crown chakra; in the other exercises the exhalation is through the nose and mouth.

Hold the inhalation throughout the exercise and exhale only at the end. If you need more air during the exercise, do short re-inhalations. If that is not enough, rotate the head three times in each direction rather than five and slowly build up to five.

When working with the upward-moving prana, it's almost impossible to be depressed. It is the uplifting prana, the opposite of depression. Even common language refers to "feeling down" or "feeling up." The experience of the practice should be one of increased clarity, like reaching the top of a hill and looking out. Notice the freshening of the senses, an increase in light, a greater wakefulness. After each completion of the exercise, rest with a relaxed and spacious mind. Allow your eyes to be open, gazing slightly upward. Don't chase thoughts. Don't push thoughts away. If you know the nature of mind, relax in it. If not, try to remain present, feeling all of your body as a whole. Notice how experience changes as a result of the practice and support the change. Abide in presence as long as the experience stays fresh and open, and then repeat or move to the next exercise.

Life-force prana

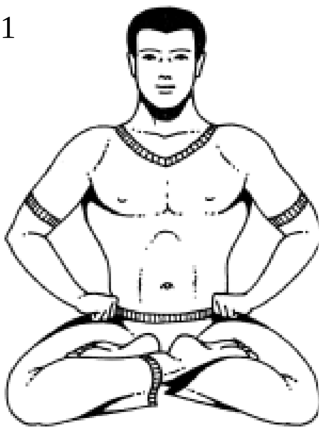
This practice is related to the space element.

Inhale and hold the breath in the chest, concentrating in the heart chakra. Re-inhale while maintaining the attention in the heart chakra and expand the chest completely. Hold the breath throughout the practice.

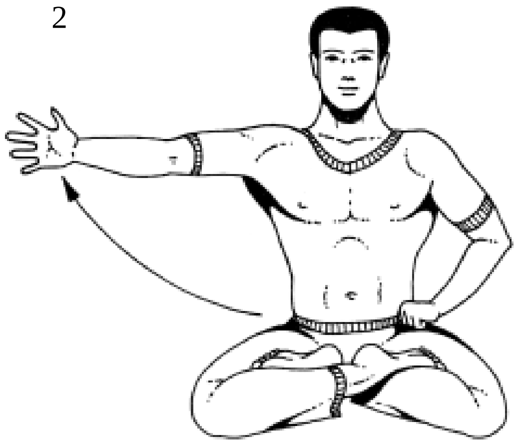
Place your left hand on your left hip, fingers forward and thumb to the back; lift your right arm out to the side and up until it is about 45 degrees

Life-force prana

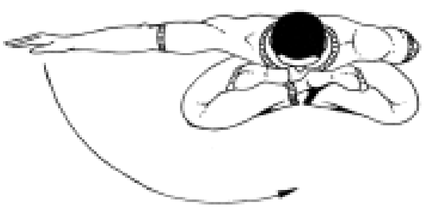
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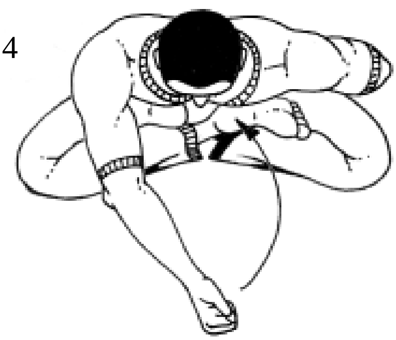
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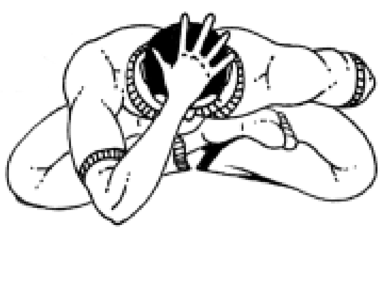
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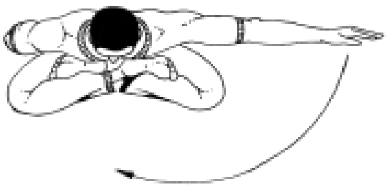
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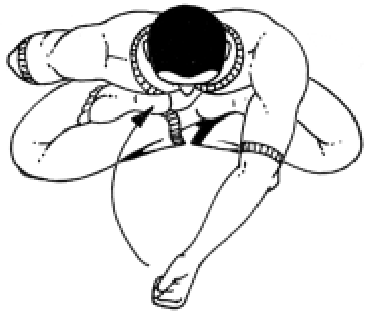
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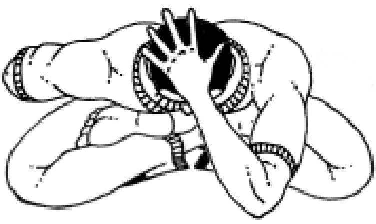
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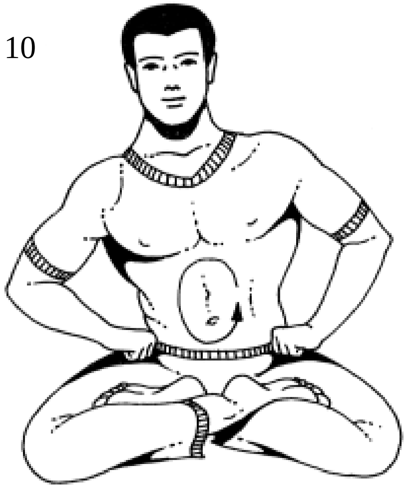
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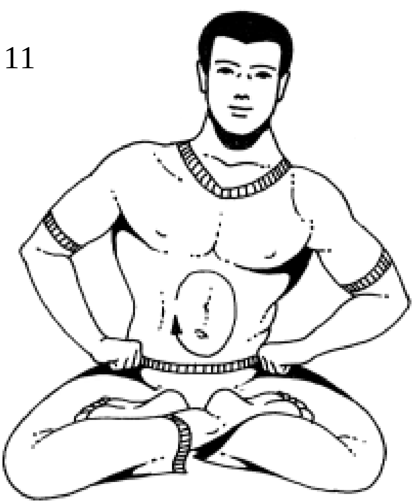
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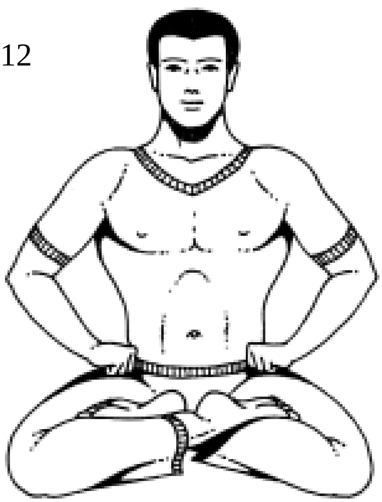
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from the vertical, with the fingers extended straight out in the same direction. (To help with this, imagine that 12 o'clock is directly overhead, six o'clock directly below you. For this exercise, fully extend the arm so that it is pointing to one-thirty.) Holding your breath, move the hand and arm forward, curling the fingers over the thumb, index finger first, to make a loose fist. The arm then draws a circle in the air above the head. (Pretend that you are twirling a lasso overhead and you will find the correct movement of the arm.) As the hand moves over the crown of the head, the fist begins to open, again index finger first. Continue to circle the hand back and then out to the side with the fingers extended so that it is back in the position in which it started. This is one rotation. Do this rotation five times with the right hand.

Then lower your right hand until it holds the right hip, and raise the left arm. Repeat the rotation with the left hand but in the opposite direction—from extended to the side, toward the front, over the crown, toward the back, and then out to the side again. Do this five times.

While rotating the arm, stretch the chest open and move all the muscles of the chest and upper back. When the hand is extended out to the side, the shoulder should be stretched fully toward the hand. When the hand moves to the front of the body and then over the head, keep the elbow extended out to the side; don't collapse the chest.

Still holding the same breath, lower the left hand to hold the left hip. Holding both hips, fingers to the front and thumbs in back, rotate the chest. The focus is on rotating the heart chakra; the torso follows that movement. Try to rotate the chest perpendicular to the ground, five times in one direction, five times in the other. The rotation of the chest will follow a circular motion: down, right, up, left, down–five times—and then reverse. Imagine bringing the heart chakra down to the ground as much as possible without bending; then move it as far as possible to one side; then up as high as possible; then as far as possible to the other side; and back down. Make the movement large so that you stretch the muscles of the chest and back. Feel as if the heart center is rotating and your body is simply following.

After you have finished the ten rotations, exhale through the nose and mouth and feel the prana pervade the body. Sit in a relaxed posture. Let the mind dissolve in pure presence. Rest in that until the experience of clear presence dims. Then repeat or move on to the next exercise.

Fire-like prana

This practice is related to the fire element. There is always heat in the area behind the navel, the center of digestion and metabolic heat. The navel

Fire-like prana

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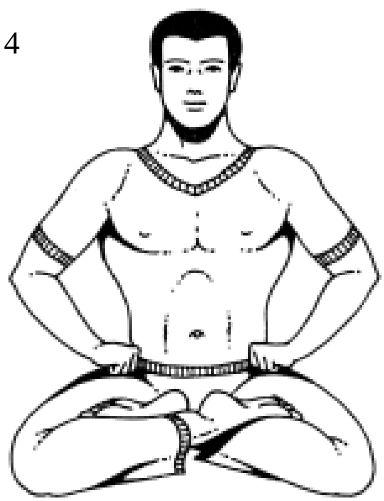
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chakra, situated behind the navel in the center of the body, is the seat of the fire-like prana.

Inhale and hold the air in the belly, concentrating in the navel chakra, while doing the *kumbaka* or "vase retention" exercise. This entails lightly tensing the muscles of the perineum and anus, pulling up the pelvic floor. At the same time, the diaphragm, the sheet of muscle placed like a floor under the bottom of the rib cage, tightens and pushes down. The breath is held between the pelvic floor and the diaphragm as if being compressed in the navel chakra. Don't allow the throat to feel closed. Re-inhale and, maintaining the focus and kumbaka, let the vital air spread internally, as if filling and nurturing the whole middle of the body.

Holding the breath, rotate the belly five times in one direction and then five times in the other. The rotation is horizontal, parallel to the ground, like the turning of a record on a record player. Move the entire lower torso five times in a big circle, counter-clockwise, maintaining the concentration of the held breath. Then repeat in the opposite direction. Focus on moving the belly to one side, then back to touch the spine, to the next side, then far forward.

Exhale when you have finished the rotations. Abide in pure presence. Feel the openness in the navel area and the increased heat. Relax in the experience until it loses its vibrancy, then repeat or move on to the next exercise.

Pervasive prana

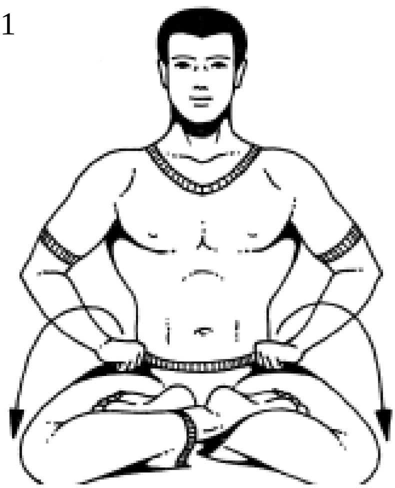
This practice is related to the air element. The pervasive prana is everywhere in the body. The breath is held in this exercise but is not focused in a particular place. Don't lock the throat or the pelvic muscles—keep the body open. Feel the prana pervading each cell, reaching to the tips of the fingers and toes and to the end of each hair on your head.

Inhale and place your hands in front of your chest, palm to palm in the gesture of prayer. Re-inhale and, keeping the elbows close to the body, let the lower part of the arms drop down so that they extend horizontally from either side of the body. The palms are facing up. Holding the breath, clap the hands above your head, rub them against each other briskly to generate warmth, and then massage your whole body, particularly any areas that feel blocked. Quickly massage the head, arms, chest, back, and legs, as if asking every cell in the body to wake.

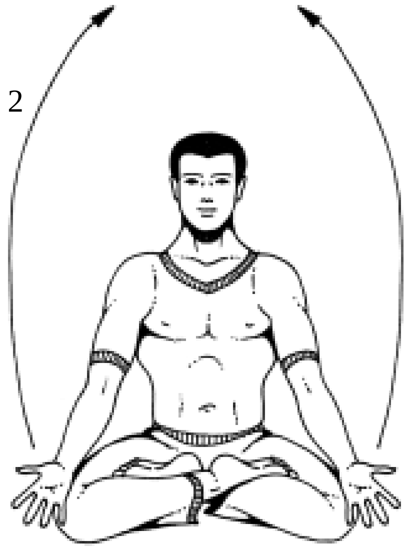
Still holding the breath, extend the right arm fully from the right side of your body as if holding a large bow. Use the left hand to draw the strong, imaginary string of the bow back across the body to the left, expanding the upper torso and opening the chest. Then bring the hands toward each other, until they almost meet in front of the chest. Do this rapidly five times, fully

Pervasive prana

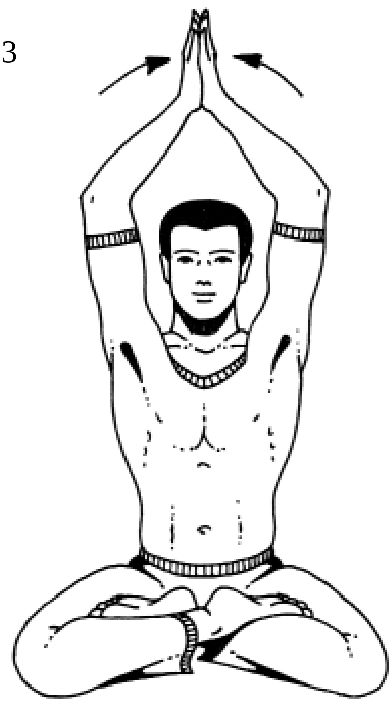
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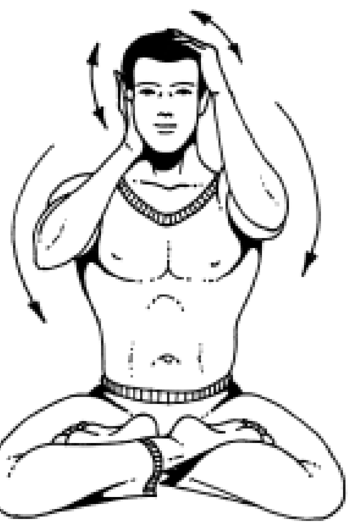
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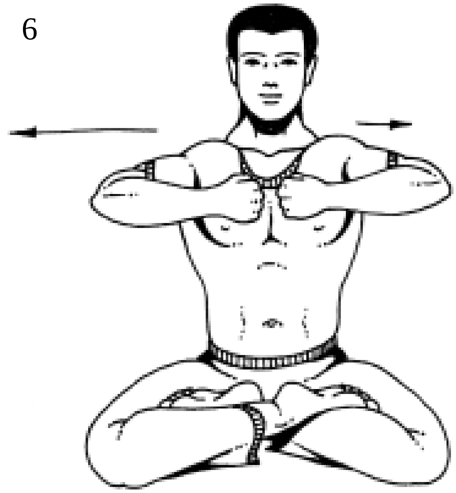
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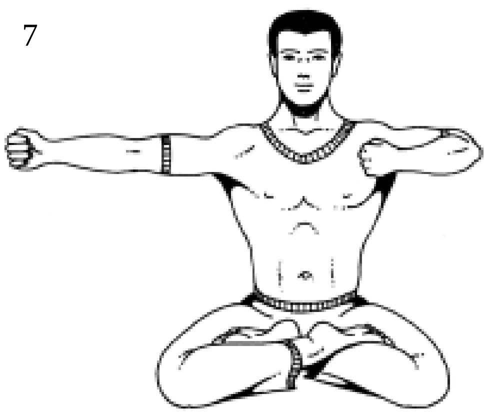
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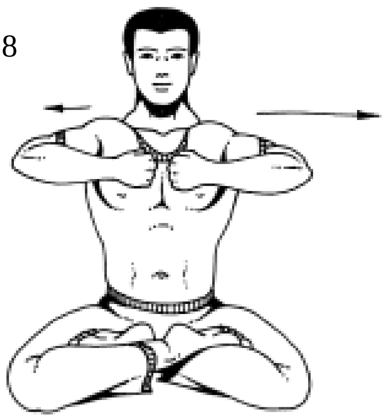
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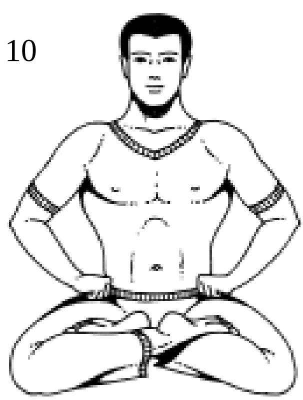
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extending the right arm to the right, pulling back with the left hand, feeling the stretch across the chest.

Then extend the left arm fully and repeat the movement, this time drawing the string back across the body with the right hand. Do this five times. Keep your face turned in the direction the arrow would go.

During all this, hold one breath. Do fewer repetitions if necessary. Don't lock the breath anywhere, allow it to pervade the body. At the end, exhale. Pay attention to the sensation that pervades the body. Rest in that experience until you lose connection with pervasive energy. Then repeat or move on to the next exercise.

After this exercise, you will feel very clear and bright. The body feels alive, the flesh awake. There is joy and clarity. Use the mind to support and extend the experience. Relax in the natural state.

Downward-moving prana

This exercise is related to the water element.

Inhale and hold the air in the area of the perineum, between the anus and the genitals, concentrating in the secret chakra behind the sexual organs. Tighten the perineum and anus, lightly pulling up the floor of the pelvis. In this exercise, do not tighten the diaphragm and push down; only pull up. Re-inhale while maintaining the focus and the hold, and concentrate the prana in the secret chakra.

With legs crossed at the ankles, right leg in front of the left, knees high, use both arms to embrace the right leg at the level of the knee. Slowly rotate the pelvis towards the right leg and back five times. Then embrace the left leg and rotate to the left five times. Finally, hold both knees and rotate the abdomen five times in one direction and then five times in the other direction. Through all this, hold the breath and maintain the focus in the secret chakra. Try to feel that you are rotating on the chakra itself.

Exhale when you have finished. Direct the prana downward out of your body and feel it sink into the ground. Relax with your eyes open, gazing slightly upward. Rest in that experience until it loses its freshness. Then repeat if you wish. After the last repetition, try to remain longer in the state of contemplation. Finish the practice period with the dedication of merit.

The Practice in Daily Life

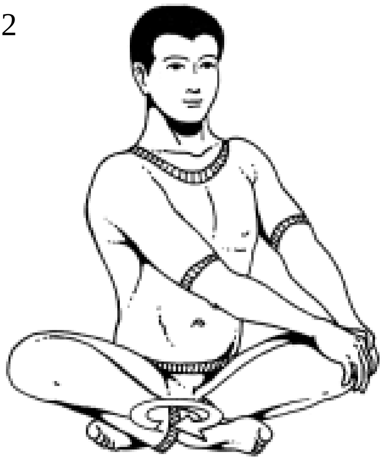
Though the practice promotes well-being and enhances the quality of life, the real purpose behind doing it is to support the experience of the nature of mind. Like the shamanic practices, the tantric practices balance what is out of balance and develop what is deficient. Unlike the shamanic practices,

Downward-moving prana

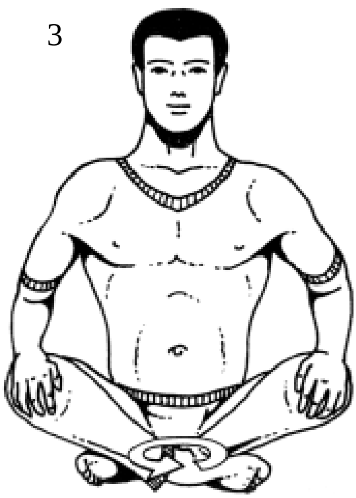
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they are not usually done only to address a specific situation or condition but are practiced on a regular basis. By practicing regularly we can keep the flow of energy open in the body. Then we will be neither dull nor agitated, neither weak nor restless. This balance makes it much easier to practice meditation. It helps clear the mind and invigorate the body, supporting us to recognize and abide in the nature of mind.

THE FIVE INTERNAL TSA LUNG PRACTICES

As with any spiritual practice, learning the external form of the tsa lung is the easiest part. Then we must learn how to generate and support the internal experience. Doing yogic practices while the mind is wandering doesn't produce strong results. Therefore, try to understand what each part of the practice is for, its purpose and method. Stay focused.

The next set of practices has the same intent and goal as the previous one. Although these practices are called internal, they involve movements of the body, though less so than in the external practice. They work with the same pranas in the same chakras as does the external practice.

Upward-moving prana

This practice opens the top of the central channel and the throat and crown chakras.

Inhale. With your mouth closed, pinch your nose shut and blow out very, very gently, as if clearing your ears in an airplane or while diving. Be very careful and very gentle so as not to hurt your ears. The point is not to clear your ears but to use the internal pressure to direct your attention to the crown chakra. As much as possible, experience the sensation on the crown of your head. Use your imagination to concentrate the pressure in the central channel and to feel it open the chakra.

If you don't feel anything, just keep your attention fixed on the crown. Exert a slight pressure with your held breath.

When you do feel the sensation, be present with it. Let the breath become natural. Stay focused in the crown chakra, but let the awareness be completely open and free.

Exhale, directing the prana upwards through the chakra.

Do this practice any time you wish, but particularly when feeling down, depressed, or dull; when feeling that you don't have the strength to handle the tasks you need to do; when lacking clarity or wakefulness; and when distracted or confused.

Life-force prana

The life-force prana is centered in the heart chakra. Feel your heart beat, put your hand on your chest if needed. Take a deep breath, relax. Then inhale. Imagine that, with the inhalation, light and positive energy stream toward your heart from all directions, entering the heart chakra and re-vitalizing the life-force prana. While remaining relaxed, hold the breath and concentrate it in the heart chakra to cultivate the energy there. Use the sensations of the expanded chest, the stretched skin and muscles, to bring your focus into the chest. Exhale slowly and gently, and relax completely. Repeat, keeping the focus on the heart chakra in the central channel. When finished, rest in the experience as long as it remains fresh.

Do this practice in situations similar to those mentioned for the upward-moving prana as well as those that seem to be draining your life-energy and vitality or causing frustration or unhappiness. The exercise supports centered awareness.

Fire-like prana

The fire-like prana is concentrated in the navel chakra. The metaphor used in this practice is that the belly is an ocean, the spine is the rock on the shore. The ocean needs to flow up and around the rocks and then back. Inhale, hold the breath while pulling the belly back against the spine, and then smoothly release with the exhalation. Rest in pure awareness. Repeat.

This practice is good to do when you are feeling scattered. Pay attention to the sensation of increased heat in the navel area. Use imagination to circulate the fire prana throughout the body.

Pervasive prana

The pervasive prana pervades the body.

Lie down or sit in meditation posture. Contract your body into the smallest possible space while exhaling. Make your body as small as possible and tense all your muscles. Then, while inhaling, slowly open the fingers, the arms, the legs, the torso. Stretch out and relax, taking up as much space as possible. As you stretch, feel the movement of the pervasive prana from the center of the body out to all parts, to the tips of the fingers and toes. Exhale and relax in pure presence, feeling the prana pervade your entire body and the space around you.

It is very satisfying to do this practice in the morning upon awakening, but you can do it whenever you wish.

Downward-moving prana

In this practice the focus is in the secret chakra, behind the genitals. Contract the muscles of the pelvic floor, the muscles of the perineum and anus, hold for a few moments, then release. Repeat. You can also, if you wish, hold the breath while contracting and releasing a few times. Exhale on the final release, directing the prana downward out of the body, and merge with the relaxation that comes with the release. The relaxation makes this a good practice to do when anxious or ungrounded.

THE FIVE SECRET TSA LUNG PRACTICES

General

The secret level of these practices works with the same five pranas as do the previous practices, but these practices are done entirely with the mind, thus they are "secret." They are a simplification of the tsa lung practices that can be done anywhere because they use only attention, not movement, to activate the chakras.

A shape and a color are associated with each chakra. The shape is not related directly to the shape of the chakra, but rather to the pattern made by the channels of energy in that location. The color is related to the qualities of the elemental energy being activated in the chakra. The syllable *A* [ཨ] is visualized in each chakra to support and protect the experience.

Practice with each chakra three times or until it feels clear. Then evoke in it the quality you wish to cultivate: compassion, peacefulness, love, openness, wisdom, generosity. Develop the qualities you need in your practices and in your daily life. This practice is analogous to clearing a room for a shrine and then making the altar, hanging the sacred images, and lighting the incense.

Focus on the crown chakra. Visualize an umbrella shape rising from the throat chakra and spreading out through the brain to the top of the head. The color is pale yellow or gold. The upward-moving prana, associated with the earth element, rises through the throat chakra, through the brain, and up to the crown chakra.

Pray that the five wisdoms, the positive divine qualities, awaken here and that they become strong and vivid. Feel the opening of your crown chakra, your connection to the highest spiritual dimensions. Visualize a luminous white *A* in the crown chakra. Let it intensify. It represents compassion. Allow compassion and luminosity and bliss to pervade all experience—your entire body, every being, and every place. The compassion is lively

and rich, not a sentimental, artificial emotion. It is the deep compassion that arises spontaneously in the enlightened nature.

Focus on the throat chakra. Allow it to open and relax. A luminous white *A* is in the chakra, representing peacefulness. It radiates peacefulness in every direction and pervades each cell in the body. It also pervades the environment and all beings.

Draw your attention to the heart chakra, the center of the life-force prana which is associated with the space element. The heart center is spacious, full of white light in the shape of the wish-fulfilling jewel. Let it open and relax. There is presence in the heart — become that. Visualize a luminous, white *A* in the heart. Evoke the qualities of love and openness and let them pervade everywhere like pure white light radiating through all time and space.

Put your attention in the navel chakra. This is in the center of the torso, not the front. It is red. The fire-like prana is concentrated there. The channels radiate out like the spokes of a wheel; feel the heat radiating out from the chakra. Let all tension go. Visualize a luminous white *A* in the chakra. Evoke and support the qualities of clarity, wisdom, and the natural state of mind. Let that penetrate throughout existence. Everything is clear presence; every being is a manifestation of pure wisdom.

Focus on the chakra between the navel and the secret chakra, approximately four finger-widths below the navel, where the side channels join the central channel. The pervasive prana associated with the air element is concentrated here. Feel the air quality. Visualize a white, luminous *A*. Allow the positive aspects of air to arise: flexibility, clarity, intelligence. Let the positive qualities radiate from the chakra throughout space like green rays of light.

Let the mind focus on the secret chakra, where the downward-moving prana associated with the water element is concentrated. The energy is concentrated in the shape of a bellows with its point facing down. Feel the strong presence of the element. Visualize a white *A*. Evoke and sustain the quality of generosity. Let the knots of greed and desire unbind. Relax the tensions of self-centeredness and dissolve the fear of loss. Radiate the energy of openness, sharing, and giving.

Use your imagination to develop your experience, to bring the changes into awareness, and to support and sustain the positive qualities. Work with all of them together or just one positive quality and one chakra. Pay attention to the differences in experience when you focus on different chakras. Experiment. Do the practices during your meditation period, or during the day when you need to come back to yourself, or at anytime.

When you need energy, do the more physical practices. They will en-

liven your experience. Do the more subtle exercises afterward, when you can't do the physical ones for any reason, or when you are sitting quietly or walking.

Whenever the experience of the positive quality is generated, radiate it out in the form of light to positively affect every being and every element of the environment. Tantra works with this kind of transformation until it becomes a habitual way to perceive the world. Goodness really is in the world; it is only the distortions of our karmic tendencies that keep us from knowing so directly.

If you have a headache, feel the peacefulness in the headache. If there is turmoil—people angry, the weather stormy—be aware of the peacefulness in the ground of the anger, the peacefulness of the space through which the storm passes. As you work with each quality, find it in even the most unlikely experiences. It's like hearing the silence under the loudest sounds.

OPENING THE CHAKRAS

Each of the exercises above opens a different chakra—but why is it important to open the chakras? One metaphor has the central channel as the trunk of a tree. The chakras are the branches; the pranic energies are flowers; the qualities associated with the chakras are the fruits. The fruit is ripened when the qualities manifest in awareness. When the chakras are closed, the qualities cannot be fully expressed. For example, when the chakras are closed, there is still compassion but it is a small experience. When the chakras are completely open, the compassion is larger and more inclusive and begins to approach the global, fundamental compassion that naturally arises in the buddhas.

The practices of channels and winds unblock the channels and chakras. The process is like unblocking ice that is stuck in a pipe: you can shake it or heat it up, and then blow through it to clear it. The physical movement is like shaking the pipe; holding the breath and directing the prana with the mind heats it up. Exhaling is like blowing through the channels and chakras to clear them. The result is the feeling of openness and release.

As I have said before, going beyond the physical practices by using the imagination and attention will help us open to the energetic level of experience and shift the quality of consciousness. Then we find that in the heart is a buddha of compassion; in the crown, a buddha of bliss; in the throat, a buddha of peace; in the navel, a buddha of wisdom; and in the secret chakra, a buddha of generosity.

Sometimes people have specific experiences when a chakra opens. Be-

cause many people in the West have been conditioned to experience energetic blocks in the body as emotional rather than physical or energetic, they often experience the release of the block as an emotional catharsis. Traditionally, in Tibetan culture, the release of blocks manifests more as energetic and physical phenomena: the practitioner may quiver, shake, twitch, sweat, become dizzy, and so on. Other people may find that images rise in their minds as they concentrate on a chakra. These images may be tied to blocks or tensions that have constricted the flow of prana through the chakra —negative memories or traumas. Or positive images may come when the chakra is open—spiritual symbols, deities, buddhas, goddesses, and so on.

However it's not necessary to have some kind of experience when the chakra opens—it's more likely that nothing in particular will happen. The deeper opening is not emotional nor is it about images. But if something does happen, just give it space to occur and don't hold on to it. Allow it, then allow it to go. It's only an experience of purification, nothing to hold on to.

If you have no sensation in one of the chakras, it's likely that the chakra is blocked. Try to consciously relax the area. Massage it. Breathe into it. The mind can reach it with attention and awareness. When it does, it moves prana into the area. This will help.

Whether or not you first have experiences of emotional release or images or physical manifestations, eventually the experience will be of space, openness, and positive qualities that are traditionally thought of as different aspects of wisdom.

Because people often depend on weaknesses and problems to support their identities, when those are taken away the experience of spaciousness can be frightening. Then old habits will reassert themselves and the space will be filled with whatever daydreams or emotional experiences or actions normally fill the space of life.

Instead, you can use armor to protect the space: visualized sacred syllables, mantras, deities, or images of your teacher. Generate positive symbols in the space of the chakras to protect them from the return of habitual karmic tendencies and habits.

Tantra never considers the body to be sinful or impure. Instead it is a mandala or palace of the sacred. In some tantric texts there are enumerations of the number of deities in the hands, the head, the organs, and so on, so that the entire body is understood as a network of divine energies and potentialities. The sacred nature of the body needs to be recognized and lived.

FOUR

THE FIVE ELEMENTS IN THE GREAT PERFECTION

This book would not be complete without a section on Dzogchen. Dzogchen teachings are integrated with an understanding of the elements. However, unlike the sections of the book on shamanism and tantra, there are no specific practices given. Although there are supportive practices described in Dzogchen texts, the essential practice of Dzogchen does not begin until the practitioner recognizes the nature of mind. It is easy to make a mistake, thinking one experience or another is the nature of mind when it is not. The best way to become certain regarding this most vital point is to work with a teacher who knows the nature of mind and knows how to point it out to others.

Because this chapter is meant primarily for practitioners who have already had Dzogchen teachings, a few of the terms may be unfamiliar to some readers.

THE GREAT PERFECTION



In the Bön tradition, the highest teaching is Dzogchen, the Great Perfection or Great Completion. Dzogchen teaches that the basis of the individual and of all phenomena is inseparable emptiness *(tong pa nyid)* and luminosity *('od sal)*.

Emptiness is the essence of all entities. This means that the most fundamental truth of things and beings is that they have no essential identity. Entities conventionally exist as conceptual designations but their identity is not intrinsic; it is situational and tran-

sitory. As conditions supporting an identity pass away and new conditions arise, the identity changes. A tree is set alight and becomes fire, then ash; eventually no trace of the tree can be found. Where did the tree go? Even our subjective sense of self is conditional, conceptually designated, changeable, and impermanent.

This emptiness is not simply a nihilistic lack of existence or an absence of meaning. Obviously experience continues to arise for each of us. Awareness, together with the endless arising of phenomena in experience, is the other aspect of fundamental reality: luminosity or clarity. Luminosity is both the concept and the sensual experience that best represents awareness, which is often symbolized by light. And luminosity also represents our experience of phenomena as they "light up" in our experience.

Emptiness and luminosity are inseparable. Emptiness is luminous and luminosity is empty. In Dzogchen this fundamental reality is said to have a capacity or energy *(tsal)* expressed as the unceasing manifestation of phenomena—the endless arising and passing away of countless luminous worlds and beings—all essentially empty but existing as a passing play of light. Phenomena arise as a display of the basis of all (kunzhi), as the non-dual manifestation of empty luminosity.

In the context of this book, emptiness and luminosity can be represented by space and light. Dzogchen is the great knowledge of space and light. Space is the empty Great Mother from which all things arise as a luminous display, in which all things have their existence, and into which all things dissolve. The luminous display is the play of the five pure lights, the essence of the five elements. The manifestation is all things and all beings and all elements of experience. This is the basis of the Dzogchen view.

CREATING SAMSARA

The true nature of all sentient beings is buddha-nature and all phenomena are fundamentally pure. Subjective identifications and external appearances are empty phenomena, spontaneously arising as the play of the elemental energies. Even filth, disease, and apparently evil beings are naturally pure.

Yet we suffer.

Unless we actually abide in the nature of mind, talk about non-dual presence and primordial purity remains only talk about concepts, ungrounded in experience. It is easy to allow Dzogchen to remain theory, and not put it into practice. My teacher, Lopon Tenzin Namdak Rinpoche, often points out that it is a mistake to confuse the non-dual view of Dzogchen with the practitioner of Dzogchen who struggles in the dualities of samsara. While

the Dzogchen view is non-dual, in ordinary life there is pure and impure, positive and negative, helpful and harmful, and we have to know the difference and act accordingly.

Earlier in the book I wrote about the five pure lights, about the process through which the purity of the elemental energies comes to be perceived as the substantial, dualistic world we experience around us. Because we do not recognize the nature of our own minds, we come to identify with a "me" in opposition to all that is "not-me." Our identities are constricted and we experience phenomena as separate from us. This process is rooted in the wrong view that things and beings exist independently. Our internal confusion becomes external manifestation.

Conversely, as we experience the external world and ourselves as empty luminosity, we start to thin the primordial ignorance that traps us in the cycles of suffering. There is no conflict with anything in experience. The elements naturally settle into a balanced relationship. Through recognizing and abiding in the nature of mind, we dissolve dualistic experience into the empty radiance that is its basis.

Correcting the view isn't about changing beliefs, though that is a start. It means changing the processes of experience and dissolving the dualism of subject and object. We must recognize our own nature—buddha-nature—directly.

THE SIX LAMPS

The Zhang Zhung Nyan Gyud is an ancient cycle of Bön Dzogchen teachings. It contains quintessential esoteric teachings as well as practices relating to Dzogchen. *The Six Lamps* is a text found in the Zhang Zhung Nyan Gyud. It is a fairly long text composed of a root text and a commentary. Like the text on the five pure lights, it is a teaching that explains both the primordially pure essence and the error of the dualistic mind. Here I give a very short explanation of the text.

From *The Six Lamps:*

How are samsara and nirvana separated?
How is Samantabhadra the primordial buddha?
How do sentient beings wander in samsara with their karma?
Samantabhadra is the buddha through realizing.
Sentient beings wander in samsara through not realizing.

The empty basis (kunzhi) and innate awareness (rigpa) are the basis of delusion and realization.

The moving mind is the cause of delusion and realization.

The three visions of sound, light, and rays are the secondary causes of delusion and realization.

There is no delusion or realization in kunzhi and rigpa.

There is no separation of samsara and nirvana in kunzhi and rigpa.

There is delusion and realization in the moving mind.

There arises the separation of samsara and nirvana in the moving mind.

Samsara and nirvana, ignorance and realization, deluded beings and buddhas, all arise from the same basis, the kunzhi, which is beyond any dualism of pure or impure, existent or nonexistent. The moving mind arises from the kunzhi as a result of karma.

Samantabhadra is the primordial buddha because he was never deluded, never distracted from the natural state. He never mistook phenomena for something other than empty luminosity. We ordinary beings are distracted. We identify with the moving mind and objectify phenomena. Deluded and trapped in the dualistic vision of me and not-me, we wander in samsara.

As I stated earlier, Dzogchen teachings say that inseparable emptiness and luminosity is the true nature of all phenomena. In Dzogchen teachings, this fundamental reality is sometimes symbolized as a single sphere of pure light. It is single because it is non-dual. It is not single in opposition to something else. It has no boundaries or divisions, no inside or outside. Though it is non-dual, the elemental energies ceaselessly manifest in it. This is why it is often painted as a sphere of rainbow light made of the five elemental colors.

Light is used as a symbol because it is the least substantial of all things that we can perceive through the senses. Also, the nature of mind is radiant and clear, like light. Like the light of a candle, awareness illuminates itself as well as whatever it touches.

In Tibetan teachings, the word *nang wa* is often translated into English as "vision" or "appearance." But it does not refer only to visual phenomena. In this case, "vision" actually means "experience" and includes what is seen through the physical eyes and the mind's eye; what is heard, smelled, tasted, touched; what arises in mental experience; and what is imagined. These are all "visions" because they arise in the light of awareness, the light of pure presence. Although these are only words, they are close to describing the real experience. Luminosity means the "light" of awareness as well as all phenomena that arise in awareness, which without exception are also luminous.

The Six Lamps refers to the basis of all as well as five levels of manifest experience. The six divisions are called lamps because each refers to the same light in one of six different contexts.

The first lamp *(gnas-pa gzhi-yi sgron-ma)*

The first lamp is the luminosity of the abiding base, the primordial non-dual presence. It is not personal, not individualized, not localized, not dualistic. It is the luminous aspect that, in inseparable unity with emptiness, is the basis of all experience. If the practitioner recognizes the first lamp—not intellectually but by abiding in innate non-dual awareness—then the basis of all is known in every experience and condition and in the other five lamps.

The point of the first lamp is to recognize the *light* of kunzhi.

The second lamp *(tsi-ta sha-yi sgron-ma)*

The second lamp is the "lamp of the flesh heart," the lamp of the self-arising innate awareness, rigpa, in the dimension of the individual. It is personal only in the sense that it is the pure awareness underlying the moving mind and the sense of subjectivity. It is related to the dharmakaya. It is awareness localized as an individual experiencing. But it is not bound by any constricted identity, although through the delusions of the dualistic mind we have come to experience it as being bound.

Although rigpa is not actually localized, many practitioners can most easily recognize it through a connection to the heart center. *The Six Lamps* specifically discusses this in terms of the space inside of the physical heart. Westerners often find this strange, but it's similar to what we mean when we say that "in" each being is the nature of mind. The nature of mind is not individual and not localized. It is truer to say that we exist in the nature of mind than to say the nature of mind is in us. But in our experience it is easier to recognize the nature of mind if we go "in" to the deepest place in ourselves, the heart. This is why we say that the rigpa resides in the heart, and why the heart is the center of the life-force prana and why love is always connected to the heart. Thus we talk about the "light of the heart".

The point of the second lamp is to recognize the light of innate awareness within.

The third lamp *(dkar-'jam tsa-yi sgron-ma)*

The third lamp is the "lamp of the soft white channel." It is rigpa and the prana of rigpa as it moves in the channels of the body, particularly the channel that connects the heart to the eyes. It is associated with the sambhogakaya.

The third lamp is the rigpa as it pervades, as it seems to move from the heart center throughout experience. Rigpa is not a substance and does not move. Rigpa abides in the heart, unmoving like the dharmakaya, but here it seems to be moving. The movement in the third lamp is actually the liveliness of rigpa. It is the life-force prana. It is the wisdom of rigpa, which pervades everywhere. Although rigpa does not move, there is movement in rigpa and rigpa can be experienced in movement. The practitioner who is distracted from the nature of mind can seem to be far from rigpa but no one can ever be truly separated from his or her own nature. We find ourselves unable to recognize rigpa even though it is the awareness underneath the search, the searcher, and the not finding.

Because we seem to lose connection to pure presence, we need to go back into ourselves, into the heart, into the center of experience. If the practitioner recognizes the essence in the first lamp or abides in rigpa in the second lamp, in the apparent movement of the third lamp he or she will continue to abide in pure presence and the movement will be integrated with the nature of mind.

The point of the third lamp is to recognize the light of the penetrating wisdom as it moves through the channels.

The fourth lamp *(rgyang-zhag chu-yi sgron-ma)*

The fourth lamp is the "water lamp that lights the distance." It is the innate awareness experienced through the senses, particularly the eye (the water lamp). The teaching relates the fourth lamp to the nirmanakaya. For the practitioner, this lamp is found in the first moment of sensory experience, before the conceptual mind shapes the raw sense data into apparent entities and things. For most beings identified with the moving mind, this first moment of experience is like a very brief moment of blankness. But for the practitioner who has been introduced to the nature of mind, the first moment of any experience allows direct recognition of the innate non-dual awareness of rigpa.

The point of the fourth lamp is to see the light of naked awareness before experience is divided into particular forms or entities.

The fifth lamp *(zhing khams ngo-sprod sgron-ma)*

The fifth lamp is the "lamp of introduction to the pure land." It is the light of rigpa as it manifests as luminous, apparently external objects and visions. When the practitioner abides in the primordial awareness of the first lamp, the objects that arise to the senses remain pure and non-dual. This is known as "cutting doubt in the three bodies (kayas)."

One of the symbols used in teaching Dzogchen is the hollow doll, an empty shell with holes in it where the senses would be in a person: eyes, ears, mouth, and nose. In a dark room, a lit candle is placed inside the doll. There is light in the center of the doll, light moving throughout the doll, and light illuminating what is external to the doll—it is all the same light. Like the explanation in *The Six Lamps,* this points to the luminosity of primordial awareness as it is recognized in different contexts.

The light from inside the doll illuminates what is external to it. This is the opposite of the way we think in the West, where it is believed that the world comes into us through the senses. In the Tibetan tradition, it is believed that the awareness experiences through the senses. It is important to remember that what appears to be outside is actually phenomena arising in awareness. Experience is non-dual; subject and object arise together. They are divided into internal self and external object only conceptually—the light is not actually divided within or without. In reality both poles of duality are empty, luminous phenomena arising in the nature of mind.

This is the point of the fifth lamp—that the light of naked non-dual awareness lies under the apparent division into subject and object.

The sixth lamp *(bar-do dus-kyi sgron-ma)*

The sixth lamp is the lamp of the bardo, the intermediate state after death and before rebirth. The visions and experiences that arise in the bardo are karmically determined manifestations of our own minds, as are the experiences in this life. For the practitioner who recognizes their true nature, there is liberation. For the person who does not recognize the visions as self-arising, one vision eventually dominates and the individual is led to the realm and specific situation of his or her next rebirth in cyclic existence.

The point of the sixth lamp is the recognition of the light of samsara and nirvana.

The central teaching of *The Six Lamps* is that everything—every experience, every thought, every identity—is the manifestation of the pure, luminous basis of existence. One must recognize this and abide in the recognition. Though *The Six Lamps* does not speak of five lights, the luminosity that it is describing is the five pure lights of the elements. This is what is to be understood, recognized, and lived in.

The luminosity in the first lamp is unbound pure presence. The succeeding lamps are the fundamental pure presence abiding in the heart, arising as individual experience, operating in the senses, manifesting as phenomenal

appearance, and finally appearing as the bardo visions. The light that illuminates and is each of these varied experiences is the same sacred light, the innate non-dual awareness.

Dzogchen teachings say that all gross and subtle visions—whether the outer visions of mountains and buildings and so on or the internal visions that arise in meditation and spiritual practice—arise from the five pure lights. One needs support to experience the five pure lights internally, the support of practice and the teachings. Through the grosser external visions, one tries to experience the subtle. Through experience of the subtle vision, one tries to recognize the pure luminosity—the five pure lights—in all external visions.

For the practice of Dzogchen, one must learn to abide in the realization of the first lamp through all experience. We can meditate in a shrine room and have experiences of emptiness, clarity, and bliss. And then get up and walk to the store and become involved with someone and lose ourselves in the interaction. But the awareness underlying both the meditative experience and the distractions of our daily lives is what we must recognize and abide in. When we abide in rigpa, what we experience as external is less substantial. Our identities are less substantial. Our problems are less substantial. We experience rigpa everywhere; there is no difference between inside and outside the body. There is no difference between meditation and non-meditation. We experience rigpa through the senses. This is not done with the senses; what is experienced with the senses are the sense objects. Experiencing rigpa through the senses has nothing to do with sense objects; it is about connecting to the inner light—abiding in rigpa—and staying connected during sensual experiences.

Dzogchen isn't really about the personal. It is concerned with space and light, with emptiness and non-dual awareness, more than with the development of qualities. Dzogchen truly begins as a path when the first lamp is recognized, and it isn't the property of Tibetans or Westerners, of humans or non-humans. What is realized is the nature of every being.

SOUND, LIGHT, AND RAYS

The Six Lamps categorizes all phenomena as sound, light, or rays.

> When the three objects of vision [sound, light, and rays] arise,
> if the moving mind realizes them to be self-vision,
> then one experiences the naked innate awareness through the visions,
> then one clearly realizes the unobscured base.

It also says:

> When innate awareness is unified with light,
> all samsaric and nirvanic bodies manifest.
> When innate awareness is unified with sound,
> all samsaric speech and the speech of the buddha arises.
> When innate awareness is unified with the rays,
> all samsaric and nirvanic consciousness manifests.

If all phenomena, including the subjective sense of self, are recognized as an empty display of space and light, one is free. Then whatever arises is simply an ornament of pure being. If phenomena, including the sense of self, are reacted to as if they were independent, separate entities or objects, one is lost.

When sound manifests in awareness it is fundamentally pure sound. In the first moment of experience, sound is not divided from the subject. When sound is taken to be an external object of a subject, it is misunderstood as having an independent existence. Then meaning is projected upon it. For example, when we are very young, we hear someone speaking but do not experience it as something separate from us. Later, we learn the language and then project meaning into the sounds, but we believe that the meaning is external to us. Yet, when we encounter a foreign language, there is no meaning in it until we learn enough to project meaning into it. This is true for all sound; at first it is only sound, then we learn to project meaning on it. Sounds become words or a cat in the underbrush or a car in the distance. We hear an unknown sound and ask what it is. We get an answer, and the next time the sound arises we hear it less and think it more.

All concepts we are capable of thinking can manifest in speech. From this, samsaric and nirvanic speech arise. Samsaric speech is impure speech. It is not only speech that hurts, such as angry speech, or that misleads, such as deceitful speech, but also ordinary speech that supports a dualistic view. Nirvanic speech is the speech of the buddhas. It is said that the speech of a buddha is so powerful and pure that it will be understood even by people who ordinarily understand different languages.

When we abide in non-dual awareness, we understand language while maintaining a strong connection to the pure basis of sound. For example, someone says, “I don’t want to see you ever again.” Usually these words evoke pain or anger although in their essence they are simply pure sound. When we’re identified with a narrow self, we project meaning, feel rejected, and suffer. When we abide in rigpa, we are not identified with a personal

self and thus there is no suffering. The words are understood but they simply dissolve in awareness; they do not leave grief or anger in their passage. Their basic nature is pure and they dissolve back into that purity. Again, this doesn't mean that we are unable to talk when abiding in rigpa—we are able to respond to experience appropriately and fully, without being completely driven by karmic habit.

Light is simply the elemental energy that I have been writing about. When we combine it with awareness it reveals form. We learn to understand forms in the same way that we learn to understand language. We project meaning onto the sensual experience of sight. We can see the form of the buddha and also see forms toward which we feel violent aversion or desperate longing. But fundamentally, our experience of form is an experience of light.

In the context of the above verse, the rays are beings and objects. In the same way that the light that fills the whole sky and the rays of the sun are the same light seen in different conditions, the awareness of sentient beings is pure primordial awareness manifesting as apparently individual entities.

If we are deluded about our own nature, we are deluded about everything. We are lost in samsara, wandering, guided by karmic dispositions. What we encounter is a projection of our own minds, but we believe it to be something independent that arises on its own. This dualism leads to attraction or aversion and the result is that the elements in our personal dimension become unbalanced.

BEING WITH PROBLEMS

Everyone in samsara has problems. That is the nature of samsara. Practice will not make anyone problem-free as long as one is in samsara, despite what many Westerners seem to believe. People often ask me if people who always abide in the natural state get ill. Even people who abide continuously in this state—if they have a body!— will become ill if they live long enough. The rent still has to be paid, the car needs gas, food must be bought, relationships have difficulties, and finally the body dies.

Though practice will not remove all the difficulties of a life, it will lead the practitioner to better ways to deal with problems. This is a much bigger statement than it sounds, because in the practices the emphasis is on how to be rather than on the problem. Most people don't know how to be with a problem and often don't have a good method of working with difficulties. Instead, they have the pervasive idea that problems have substantial causes and that the resolution of problems lies there. In psychotherapy it's com-

mon to think that problems begin at a certain point in life as a result of certain situations, and that the particular time and situation must be dealt with in order to remove the problems. This may be so for particular problems, but suffering begins long before childhood, long before birth. No matter how perfect the childhood, everyone will still have problems.

Of course this doesn't mean that we should not deal with difficulties. We must, and the more skillfully we do so the more beneficial for ourselves and for the people to whom we are connected. But realizing that there is no end to problems in samsara should make it a little easier to accept them. Some people think that to accept problems is to support them, that acceptance means not addressing problems, but that is not what I mean. Accepting that there will always be problems means opening to all of life, not only to what is positive, but to everything.

Dzogchen does not attempt to overcome problems or correct their causes, nor does it renounce problems or attempt to transform them. In the pure Dzogchen view, there is no such thing as a problem. When a thought or feeling or sensation arises it is left as it is. It does not cause a reaction. And if there is a reaction, the reaction is not further engaged. The practitioner does not relate to what arises as an object of a subject who must deal with it. It just is—and then it is not. Because there is no engagement on the part of the practitioner, whatever could be a problem dissolves into empty awareness. The problem is directly experienced as empty luminosity and then has no effect. Because there is no reaction, there is no new karmic trace.

In Dzogchen, rather than work on problems, the practitioner works on recognizing and abiding in the natural state of mind. That is the actual resolution to problems, not in their particulars but as an end to "problems" as a category of experience. In Dzogchen it is said that to know one is to know all. To really know the nature of any problem is to know the nature of all problems—they are all empty luminosity.

Earlier, I wrote that all manner of disturbances could be described as an imbalance in the elements. This is also true in Dzogchen. There is no better way to balance the elements than to abide in the natural state. When abiding in the natural state, the mind is clear, the prana moves smoothly in the body, and the body functions better. Distraction from the natural state means greater elemental imbalance. It is also true that balancing the elements through any other means—diet and medicines, shamanic ritual, tantric practice, and so on—make it easier for the practitioner to abide in the natural state once it is recognized.

In the Dzogchen view, the goal is already present. Nothing has to be

developed, only recognized. The fundamental practices of Dzogchen are not aimed at developing anything, not even positive qualities. The practice is simply abiding in the nature of mind in which all qualities are already present and can spontaneously arise. Even the methods and supportive practices are not essential. Methods can become an obstacle to abiding in non-dual awareness if the practitioner believes that one must use the practice to renounce something or transform something. Practices are only used to connect to the natural state and stabilize in it.

When I first began to teach in the West, I did so in a traditional way. This usually meant explaining what was in a particular text and adding my commentary. Then it was up to the student to understand or not. But as I spent more time in the West I began to see that there was a need to teach about the teaching, to explain how to develop experience and how to apply the teachings and practices to the situations of daily life. My main interest is in teaching what can be useful to people, what can help them heal conflict, work through their unhappiness, remove obstacles to meditation, and develop stability in the natural state.

Sometimes this means applying a very profound teaching to the psychological level of experience even though the view of the teaching is beyond psychological or emotional concerns, as is the case with Dzogchen. The view of Dzogchen is the highest view, the non-dual view, but this doesn't mean that it shouldn't affect everyday situations. For the real practitioner it affects everything—every relationship and every situation.

The point of the practice is to stop being the person who has problems, and instead to abide fully in the nature of mind where there are neither problems nor a separate individual to struggle with them.

DISSOLVING SAMSARA

In the teachings of the Great Perfection there is the concept of *lhundrup,* spontaneous perfection or spontaneous presence that characterizes all phenomena, including happiness and suffering. Whatever arises in experience is perfect just as it is. *All phenomena are a manifestation of the five pure elemental lights and from the five lights all the qualities of nirvana ceaselessly manifest.* It is only because we are trapped in erroneous dualistic views that we engage in an ultimately false struggle with experience. We only need to wake—like from a dream— for it to end, and when it does we realize that it was never real. But until we awaken, we suffer.

The world we experience, the world we perceive and think we know, has developed over time. We have substantialized it, made it concrete and dis-

tinctive, a dualistic world of "you and me." Internal obscurations in the moving mind have resulted in apparently negative external phenomena; reactions to apparently external phenomena have reinforced internal obscurations. As we abide in the nature of mind, dissolving experience again and again into pure luminosity, experience eventually becomes a flow of light rather than solid forms, pure sound rather than noise or positive and negative speech, pure being rather than separate things and entities. The clarity and purity of the nature of mind result in apparently pure external phenomena. And the experience of that pure luminosity further stabilizes the practitioner in the nature of mind. This is the best way to balance the elements.

Lopon Tenzin Namdak Rinpoche's translation of and commentary on *Heart Drops of Dharmakaya* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2002) contains instructions on the rushen practices, which are important foundational practices in Dzogchen. *Rushen* means to separate or discriminate, and the rushen practices are meant to clarify experiences of the pure and impure. They lead the practitioner to recognize the nature of mind rather than to be continually distracted by what arises as experience in the nature of mind. There are different categories of rushen: outer, inner, and secret.

The outer practices work with the body. For example, one practice involves standing in a difficult yogic posture, the vajra pose, that generates a movement of energy in the body and results in three benefits: the heat generated burns karma that affects the body so there is less disease and so on; the energy aroused burns the karma that negatively affects the energy body; and if the practitioner remains in rigpa while holding the posture, the karma that generates mental disturbance and defects in the view is burned.

When the posture cannot be further maintained, the practitioner collapses. In the moment of exhaustion there is again an opportunity for impure or pure experience. If the first, the practitioner is distracted by the release and is lost in the experience—this is like the forgetfulness in any ordinary exhaustion; if the latter, the practitioner abides in pure presence.

The inner rushen practices work on the energetic level. The syllable *HUNG* is visualized and moved in accord with the mind and breath, sometimes gently and sometimes wrathfully. The peaceful practices gently integrate all appearances with light; the wrathful practices forcefully destroy appearances and dissolve them in space. The practices are done many, many times. Each time that blocks, obstacles, and identifications are represented by images and destroyed, the habitual grasping in relation to them weakens. This is not a logical or rational process—things and identities, represented as images, are simply integrated with light or destroyed or dissolved.



Photo by Marisol Fernandez

The Vajra position from the Practice of Rushen.

With nothing left to hold, the practitioner recognizes intrinsic awareness, rigpa, however briefly.

The secret rushen works directly with the mind. An inquiry is made into experience: Where do thoughts arise? abide? dissolve? When we look for the mind, nothing is found and the not finding is very clear. That is, what is found is the clarity of pure space, the nature of mind. If we recognize that space, we have found the nature of mind. If we do not recognize our own nature, the moving mind continues to search.

Practices like the rushen are preliminary practices. The real practice of Dzogchen cannot be described accurately because the words are only meaningful after one recognizes what they point toward. Most spiritual practices work to generate experiences, to develop certain positive qualities through which one finds oneself closer to one's true nature. Dzogchen practice is not about generating anything. It is not about any particular experience but is the recognition of the basis of experience. All visions of the five external elements and the five internal elements, all thoughts and experiences, dissolve into the base. When all experiences stop, even the experiences of unconsciousness, sleep, and the sense of self, what remains is inseparable emptiness and luminosity. Abiding in this is Dzogchen practice.

Dzogchen practice can be summed up like this: Recognize non-dual innate awareness, dissolve all identity in it, and abide without distraction. This main practice is described as having, and often taught as, two parts: Cutting Through, *trekchöd*, the practice of continuously cutting through distraction in order to abide in the natural state of mind; and the practice of Crossing Over, *tögal*, the visionary practices that naturally arise from Cutting Through. But these are two aspects of the same fundamental practice, which is to integrate oneself and all phenomena of experience into the natural state of mind. When this is accomplished, the elements in the dimension of the individual are naturally and spontaneously balanced. The practitioner in Dzogchen works in this secret dimension of the elements in which the elements are luminosity, the radiance of being.

Cutting Through integrates the practitioner with the space element. It emphasizes the primordial purity *(kha dag)* of emptiness. The practitioner must no longer identify with what arises in experience—including the subject—and instead abides as the empty nature of mind. All phenomena is left to arise and pass away without attachment or rejection, without a subject constituting in response to experience. The practitioner abides in pure space. "Abiding in space" means being the empty-aware space, recognizing innate non-dual awareness and dissolving identity in it.

Crossing Over emphasizes luminosity. It is the practice of light. Cutting

Through focuses on abiding in the empty nature of mind; Crossing Over integrates the expressions of the energy of the elements into the nature of mind. In one sense, trekchöd avoids involvement and tögal is involved through integrating what arises. When abiding in non-dual awareness—Cutting Through—experience is a flow of empty phenomena, an unceasing flow of light. Allowing experience to manifest without being distracted from the nature of mind is the practice of Crossing Over.

Trekchöd and tögal, though often taught sequentially, are inseparable. Without stable trekchöd there is no tögal and when trekchöd is stable everything that arises is tögal. Although it is not traditionally taught this way, all experience integrated into the natural state—experience in which the practitioner does not become distracted and does not return to the dualistic state—is tögal vision. One reason for the separation of trekchöd and tögal in teaching is to allow particular practices related to tögal, such as the dark retreat, to be taught separately.

Once a practitioner is introduced to the nature of mind by his or her teacher, practice follows a pattern described in detail in the A-khrid teachings, one of the three main Dzogchen transmissions in Bön. The pattern is: abide, dissolve, continue. The Dzogchen practitioner's goal and practice is to always abide in the nature of mind. When he or she is integrated with the nature of mind, whatever arises self-liberates, dissolving into empty luminosity. However, when one is distracted from the nature of mind, the duality of subject and object arises. Then one must use intention to return to pure presence. Then the practitioner continues in the natural state until distracted again and the process is repeated. Abide in the nature of mind, dissolve distraction, continue in the natural state.

APPRECIATING THE SPACE ELEMENT

Often I hear people say they want to be more grounded, more open, more accepting, and freer. They usually think they must rearrange something in their life to accomplish this or develop something new, but these are qualities of their own nature. They are qualities found in the spaciousness of the nature of mind. In order to recognize these qualities, one must recognize and abide in the essence of the space element, in the empty luminosity of the natural state. Many teachings talk about this space, about emptiness, but generally people don't appreciate space as space. They have more appreciation for the things in space.

In Dzogchen, the space element is the most important element to work with. Space is boundless, beyond form and color and shape, beyond birth

and death. It is the basis of the four external elements—earth, water, fire, and air. It is the great source from which all environments and beings arise, abide, and dissolve. Space is the Great Mother.

Sometimes the Bön are called "sky-worshipers," but that's not quite right. What is true is that Bön recognizes the sacredness of space and that the sky is the external representation of the space of the kunzhi, the basis of all. Though everything that has ever existed, does exist, or will exist, arises in space, space is unstained. It neither judges nor discriminates. It does not react and is not conditioned. It remains pure and luminous.

These statements also apply to the nature of mind. Everything arises in it but it is not conditioned. Everything is born and dies in it but it is not born and does not die. Although external space is not the nature of mind, integrating with it in experience can help us recognize the nature of mind.

Most people are uncomfortable in too much space. If a house is too empty, it is considered barren. If a room is too empty, it needs furniture or screens—something to break it up, to make the space smaller. It's easy to feel disconnected in too much space, so we fill it with things we can connect to: the bed, the kitchen table, the couch, the shrine, art on the walls, books on the shelf, mementos.

This is how we live internally, too. If someone says you have an empty mind, it is an insult unless you are a practitioner. An empty life is lonely and sad. Feeling empty is associated with depression. When we start to feel empty, we go to the movies or read a book or turn on the television or pick up the phone or shop. We don't want emptiness, silence, stillness—or we want to visit them and then leave. Even when going on vacation to "just sit around and do nothing," we end up reading, swimming, playing games, eating big meals, and drinking wine. We don't really want to do nothing, and if we see someone doing nothing and staring into space too much, we think that person has a problem.

One of the most important meditations in Buddhism is on emptiness. Often people don't like that word; fullness sounds better, or suchness. But it's the same. So what does emptiness really mean in Buddhism? Wisdom. Wisdom is the realization of emptiness, the realization of *shunyata*. Wisdom is knowing the empty essence, not the qualities that arise in the empty essence. The realization of qualities is called the method. It is the other half of the path. Developing and realizing qualities like compassion and generosity is the means, and realizing the empty space in which qualities arise is wisdom.

If you have practiced dharma for a long time, you've heard a lot about emptiness. Probably every teacher you've ever studied with, every dharma book you've read, talks about emptiness. But has it changed you? You may be able to explain the interdependent nature of all phenomena or lack of inherent existence, but if this is just theory it may not have much of an effect in your life. Even if studying dharma and philosophy is the main activity of your life, if you believe that the empty essence is something far away in experience and almost impossible to realize, then you will not experience it directly. This is unfortunate because the luminous emptiness is your own nature. It is not far or remote—the problem with recognizing it is that it is so close that it is hard not to look beyond it.

Realizing the nature of mind, we find that what we are in the inseparable state of awareness and emptiness. When we realize that, we realize the essence of space. If we abide in the nature of mind, merged with space rather than identified with what arises in space, there is an effect in life. There is nothing to defend, no self that needs protecting, because our own nature is spacious and can accommodate everything. Emptiness needs no defense. Space cannot be damaged. No one can do anything to it. An opinion or image can be attacked and hurt but the space in which the opinion or image exists is indestructible. It does not age, does not develop or deteriorate, isn't born, and doesn't die. Through this realization, confidence and fearlessness arise. Though experience arises without ceasing, we remain connected to the unchanging space in which it arises. We need not try to own it or claim it. It is here already, beyond hope and fear. When the nature of mind is realized, the spontaneous perfection of all phenomena is understood and primordial purity is realized.

The practitioner of Dzogchen first tries to understand this space of the nature of mind. Then he or she must recognize it through meditation and the pointing out instructions of the teacher, then develop the connection to it. Finally, the practitioner integrates with space, which is what "abiding in the nature of mind" means. It's not that the practitioner becomes something different. We have to use the language of development to talk about the path, about how to get somewhere we want to go. But really there is no place to go, there is nothing to develop. It's a question of waking, of recognizing what already is.

When the space of the nature of mind is realized there is still a flow. This is the luminosity; there is movement, sensation, liveliness. Experience is richer than it was, not poorer. Qualities arise endlessly. Compassion or sadness, anger or love may arise, but the practitioner doesn't lose the connection to the space from which they arise.

Space is the ground of everything, the fundamental reality. We generally think of earth as representing groundedness, and it does as long as we believe ourselves to be one thing separate from everything else. In duality, earth is the ground, space is the absence of ground. But in Dzogchen, space is the ground. The practitioner merged with space is more grounded than earth because he or she is the space in which earth exists; is more comfortable than water because space has no obstructions; is more flexible than air because air can go no place that space is not already; is more creative than fire because space gives rise to fire. Space is what we truly are.

INTEGRATING WITH SPACE AND THE OTHER FOUR LIGHTS

It's almost impossible to experience the pure light of experience if we do not have a deep connection to pure space. In the Tibetan tradition we usually say it this way: One must recognize and abide in the nature of mind in order to recognize and exercise the energy of the nature of mind.

The experience of light can help us develop the experience of space just as the experience of space can lead to the recognition of the pure clarity of light. Try paying attention to experience, right now, as if everything were only light. Go beyond form, beyond the limitations of the eye, beyond the duality of sense and sense object. Experience is a flow of light and awareness. That's all, and it includes everything. This is a practice that can be done anytime. Nothing changes but everything is different. Instead of just seeing the form, see the light. Instead of just hearing the words, see the light. Instead of just tasting dinner, see the light. It's all light and it can be "seen" in every sense. Go beyond dividing experience into different sense fields, into inner and outer, into me and not-me. Experience is unified.

Working with the sensual world is important and helpful, as is working with emotional experiences and mental events. When emotions arise—even powerful, overwhelming ones—they, too, are simply light. When hatred or jealousy or joy arises, they are all light. Abide in space, experience light; abide as light, experience space.

It can be helpful to remember that the heart center is the place to connect to space and light. It's the place of devotion, the place where the real master resides. It is where Samantabhadra and Tapihritsa are. The real master is that light in the heart, the non-dual awareness, rigpa. Connect your mind to your heart and then, keeping the connection to pure presence, open the senses and relax. Experience the flow of light in space. Stay open. Dzogchen

is about openness. The more things are constricted and substantialized, the harder it is to connect to space and light.

When you are too distracted to remain present in this way, pray. Prayer is more powerful than we usually think it is. Pray for the connection to the inner light. Prayer binds thought and directs it, pulls us out of the drama of emotion, and provides relief and direction. Human beings are always busy, and it's better to be busy with prayer than to be lost in fantasies of the past or future.

Just as staying connected to light is helpful, so is remaining connected to space. Rather than keeping attention only on the objects in space, try to spend a whole day aware of the space that objects are in, the space in which thoughts arise, the space in which the furniture in your room sits, the space in which the sky is blue. We live in space all day, sleep in space, and manifest dreams in space. Without a conscious connection to space, we are lost. With connection to space, we can never be lost.

In the Cutting Through practice, sky gazing is important. If we sit and gaze into the sky—not focusing on clouds or birds—we're not looking at substance. We're looking into space. Space doesn't do anything, it doesn't say anything, but it has a profound effect. If we have stability in the practice, connection to external space connects us with internal space.

In practice we can connect with internal space and then external space, or use the experience of external space to connect to internal space. It doesn't matter which, as the point is to recognize that external space, internal space, and the space of the mind are all the same empty, luminous space. Abiding in the space of the nature of mind, we not only are free, we are freedom.

THE DARK RETREAT: VISIONS OF THE FIVE ELEMENTS

After the Dzogchen practitioner has been introduced to the natural state of mind by the master, he or she is taught the Crossing Over practices of tögal: the dark retreat, sky gazing, and sun gazing. Tögal practice is very much about the elements.

In the dark retreat the practitioner spends months practicing in a room or cave into which not even the slightest light enters. It is commonly understood that the lack of physical light can lead to depression and claustrophobia, and there are therapies for depression that are based on exposing people to light. But when abiding in pure luminous presence in the dark retreat, practitioners do not become claustrophobic or depressed, even though they are in total darkness in a small room for a long time (in Bön the dark retreat is traditionally forty-nine days and is often done for longer). In fact, there is

sometimes the opposite problem. Because so much is happening, the practitioner may be excited and the thoughts become wild and hard to control. *Trekchöd* means stabilization in space, a state that results in no claustrophobia. And *tögal* is the manifestation of light. In the small physical space of the dark retreat there is a lot of space and light—the space of the base of existence and the illumination of intrinsic awareness. Just as external light keeps us from becoming depressed, the internal light protects us. The vitality of the mind, of rigpa, gives the body vitality that comes from inside rather than outside.

Anyone, practitioner or not, can put themselves into a pitch-black environment and see lights. And if they stay long enough, they will begin to hallucinate. This is not tögal. If the practitioner has not had proper instruction, has not had the pointing out instructions, and cannot abide in the natural state, the visions that arise are simply mental projections shaped by karmic traces. Without trekchöd there is no tögal, and if the practitioner is not abiding in the natural state, trekchöd has not been accomplished.

This is analogous to the yogic practices of dream and sleep. When ordinary dreams arise, they are just dreams, stories manifested by the mind's interaction with karmic traces and karmic prana. But when the dreamer abides in the natural state, dreams arise as dreams of clarity, dreams from below the surface of individual karma, and they often contain wisdom from beyond the boundaries of the individual. The situation with sleep is similar. When an ordinary person sleeps, he or she falls into a state of unconsciousness. When a practitioner stable in the nature of mind sleeps, the body and the conceptual mind sleep but the practitioner remains fully integrated with the clear light and abides as non-dual awareness.

In the dark retreat, if the practitioner abides in the natural state, the elements come into balance. In one of the practices often prescribed for the dark retreat, the practitioner uses five postures, one for each element, to open particular channels in the body, thus affecting the flow of prana. We say that the posture, held while the practitioner abides in rigpa, evokes elemental energies and that the particular types of gazes—again there are five—are gates for the energies that allow the elemental energies to manifest externally. The internal processes of the elemental energies are reflected out, into the black room, and are reflected back to the practitioner as visions and experiences.

The Zhang Zhung Nyan Gyud describes five different stages of the tögal visions. There are five stages because they relate to the elements, from earth to space. The progressive stages are the signs of the development of a more profound connection to the elements. As we progress on the spiritual path,

internal changes are manifested in increased positive experiences in our daily lives. Relationships become easier, negative emotions have less power, and so on. In the Crossing Over practices, the positive internal changes that result from the practice also manifest externally, but as visions. In all the tögal practices—dark retreat, sun gazing, space gazing—the practitioner is trying to connect with the pure essence of the elements, the five pure lights, and the visions are the signs that the process is occurring. The visions are not the point of the practice, the internal changes are, but the visions are a way to check on the progress.

Generally, the visions begin with light and patterns of light. The light is colored—often one or two colors will dominate, or a color may not manifest at all. *There are specific shapes and colors associated with each element as it begins to manifest in its purer form: square yellow shapes for earth; circular blue shapes for water; triangular red shapes for fire; green rectangular shapes for air; and white semicircular shapes for space.* Eventually fragments of images appear, usually fleeting and unclear. Over time they become whole and stable. The progression is not random. As the practice deepens, the main channels and chakras open and karmic blocks and habitual tendencies dissolve in the nature of mind. The obscurations that clothe the pure elements in apparent substantiality are cleared and the visions become correspondingly purer. They become more complete and vivid, and the colors are more balanced. Visions of deities, goddesses, mandalas, sacred syllables, and symbols arise.

In daily life, as in the dark retreat, how we react to what arises in experience determines whether we remain deluded or move toward realization of the truth. If we are caught in the dualistic view of the moving mind, the five elemental energies are experienced as substantial. If we are stable in the nature of mind, what appears to be substantial dissolves back into pure light. One way moves toward bondage to karmic tendencies, the other moves toward freedom from conditioning. If we abide in dualism, the five lights become the five negative emotions. If we abide in the natural state, the five lights become the five wisdoms. In the dark retreat, we can find out where we are in terms of practice because the level of practice will be reflected in what manifests and how we relate to what manifests.

At the highest level of tögal practice the elements are completely balanced. All experience is integrated with the natural state. Although we usually experience the body as solid, it, also, is a manifestation of elemental light. When merged entirely with space, there is no experience of the body separate from the field of undivided experience. It's not that the body is gone, but it is experienced as a body of light. Ultimately this is how the

rainbow body *('ja' lus)* is attained. As described earlier in this book, this is the particular sign of enlightenment in Dzogchen—the release of the elements of the body at death into their pure form as colored lights.

Ordinarily, our sense of who we are depends on our environment: our bodies, relationships, circumstances, thoughts, and memories. When we abide in the nature of mind, the images and thoughts that represent our identities dissolve into the empty essence. How we relate to what manifests from that space determines whether we are caught up in delusion or freed in wisdom. Whatever experience arises to one not abiding in the natural mind —even a vision of buddhas or pure lands—is a dualistic vision rooted in the delusion of self and other. Whatever experience arises for the practitioner stable in the nature of mind is a tögal vision.

FIVE

FINAL WORDS

As practitioners, we are taught to think about the gift of the precious human body. We have been born in places where the dharma is taught, at a time when teachers are accessible and where transmission is obtainable. We live where there is the political freedom to follow our spiritual paths. Our living conditions are good and we have the leisure to practice.

What we often lack is the recognition of the gifts we have already received. Sometimes we remember how good our lives are when we are brushed by tragedy, but then, caught up again in our normal lives, we forget. We are driven away from gratitude and appreciation by dark and negative forces, by habitual dissatisfaction and constant stimulation. When others have more than us, we feel envy, but in a world where so many people have less than us, we often don't recognize how fortunate we are.

The teachings often focus on view, meditation, and behavior. What this means is that the way we see determines how we feel and think. And how we feel and think determines how we act. When we look from a dualistic viewpoint, we see an imperfect world and we live as troubled, imperfect beings in that imperfect world. When we see the world in its perfection, just as it is, we are buddhas, living in a pure land, surrounded by other buddhas.

Until we have pure vision and realize the perfection of the world and the beings in it, it is helpful if we can accept the imperfections of the world as a natural part of life, as the material with which we can work. When we turn away from any aspect of the world, we turn away from parts of ourselves. By opening to the world and accepting it as it is, we open to deeper dimensions of our own being. Complete acceptance is the end of hope and fear, the end of fantasies of the past and future. It is living entirely in the present, in what actually is.

Growing up in a monastery with highly realized and educated teachers nearby led me to dedicate my life to learning, practicing dharma, and, for the last fifteen years, teaching others. In my own studies of the shamanic (causal) vehicles, sutra, tantra, and Dzogchen, I have become aware of how deeply connected all the different vehicles and practices are, even though there are philosophical differences. Experiencing this connection is illuminating and joyful, and when it is fully realized and understood, practice becomes stronger and more flexible. We can know what practices to do when. And we can adjust the practices to overcome our elemental weaknesses and to build on our elemental strengths.

One way of understanding this connection is through an understanding of the elements. Our bodies exist as the play of the elements. We move through the energies and forces of the elements in our environment. We experience the subtle elements in and as our minds. All time and space is a play of the elements. However subtle or gross the elemental energies seem to be, they are essentially the five pure lights, the sacred fundamental energies of all that exists.

No matter what practice I do, of whatever level, I know that I am trying to more deeply integrate with the five pure lights. Sometimes I have to work with balancing the elements on a grosser level, sometimes in the energetic dimension, and sometimes on the more subtle levels of the mind. Whether I am working with a yidam or khandro, or with movements and breathing, I am always moving toward the fundamental integration that is the goal of the spiritual journey.

I hope that this work with the elements will serve many people in the future, bringing to them physical, emotional, and spiritual healing. I plan on doing more research, practice, exploration, and work with people. Eventually my students and myself will develop a site devoted to elemental practice. We will construct houses—one for each element—of particular materials, in particular shapes and colors. In them will be housed sacred elemental mandalas empowered by the elemental deities. It is our hope that people will be able to spend time there in order to reconnect with and develop the elemental energies in themselves.

I strongly believe that if more people learn these ancient teachings and learn when and how to apply them, they will improve their lives, overcome illnesses and obstacles, increase their life-spans, health, personal power, and fortunes, and develop their spiritual lives.

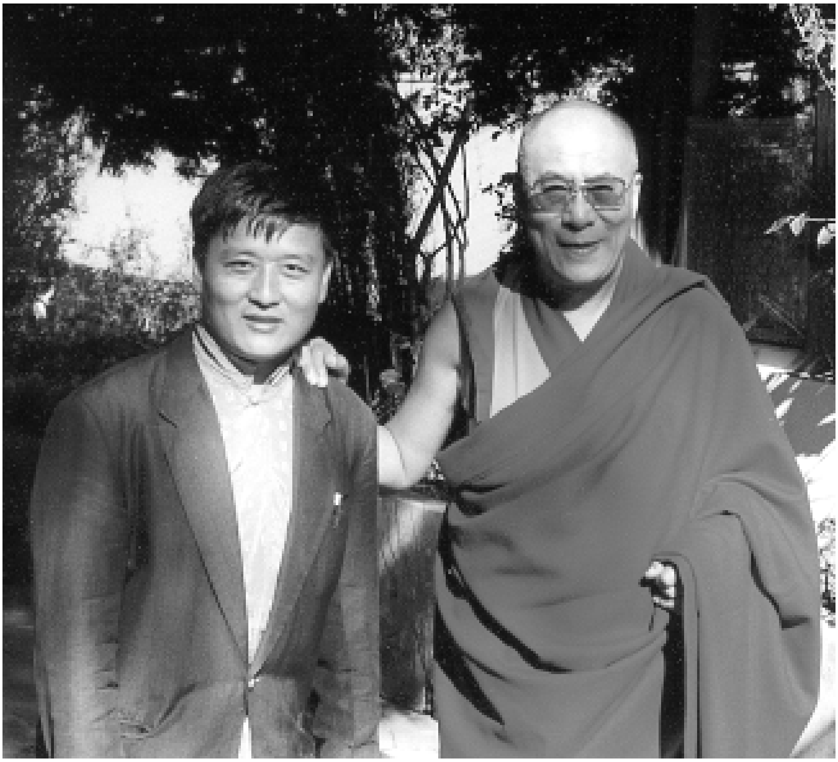
Knowing the five elements gives us a way to interact with the world, whichever world it is we are experiencing. Knowing the elements is know-

ing something fundamental, through which we can see everything. Knowing how to work with the elements gives us a key to working with all aspects of our lives, positive and negative.

It is my sincere wish that all of us quickly realize our true nature. Until that time, may we all develop compassion and love for all beings. May we open to the unbounded energy and wisdom of the primordial elements whose play is this great beauty that is our world and our lives.



The great Bönpo lama, Yungdrung Tenzing, just before death sat upright in meditation posture in Sikkim at the S.T.N.M. hospital, asked people not to touch his body for three days. He then passed through the outer manifestations of death (heart and breathing stopped), but remained in the meditation posture for thirty-three hours. Tibetan pilgrims came from far and wide to drape scarves around his body after the end of the three day period.



Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche with H.H. the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala, India.

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GLOSSARY

bardo (Tib: *bar do;* Skt: *antarabhava*). *Bardo* means "in-between state," and refers to any transitional state of existence—life, meditation, dream, death. Most commonly, the word refers to the intermediate state between death and rebirth.

bodhicitta (Tib: *byang chub sems,* abbreviated as *byang sems*). Awakened mind. Often means the compassionate mind intending to attain enlightenment for the sake of others. In Dzogchen, synonymous with innate non-dual awareness.

Bön (Tib: *bon*). *Bön* is the indigenous spiritual tradition of Tibet. It predates Indian Buddhism. Although scholars disagree about the origin of Bön, the tradition itself claims an unbroken lineage seventeen thousand years old. Similar to Tibetan Buddhist sects, particularly the Nyingma, Bön is distinguished by a distinctive iconography, a rich shamanic tradition, and a separate lineage reaching back to the Buddha Shenrab Miwoche rather than to Shakyamuni Buddha.

chakra (Tib: *'khor lo;* Skt: *chakra*). Literally, "wheel" or "circle." *Chakra* is a Sanskrit word referring to energetic centers in the body. A chakra is a location at which a number of energetic channels *(tsa)* meet. Different meditation systems work with different chakras.

channel (Tib: *rtsa;* Skt: *nadi*). The channels are the "veins" in the system of energetic circulation in the body through which stream the currents of subtle energy that sustain and vivify life. The channels themselves are energetic and cannot be found in the physical dimension. However, through practice or natural sensitivity, individuals can become experientially aware of them.

chöd (Tib: *gcod*). Literally, "to cut off, to cut through." Also known as the "expedient use of fear," and the "cultivation of generosity," *chöd* is a ritual

practice meant to remove all attachment to one's own body and ego by compassionately offering all that one is to other beings. To this end, the practice involves an elaborate evocation of various classes of beings and the subsequent imaginal cutting up and transformation of the practitioner's own body into objects and substances of offering. Chöd uses melodious singing, drums, bells, and horns, and is generally practiced in locations that incite fear, such as charnel grounds, cemeteries, and remote mountain passes.

Crossing Over (Tib: *thod rgal [tögal]*). One of the two main parts of Dzogchen practice. The emphasis is on integrating with all that arises. *Tögal* utilizes the visonary practices of dark retreat and sun and sky gazing.

Cutting Through (Tib: *khregs chod [trekchöd]*). One of the two main parts of Dzogchen practice. The emphasis is on cutting through all distractions and obscurations in order to abide in the natural state.

dharma (Tib: *bon, chos;* Skt: *dharma*). A very broad term, *dharma* has many meanings. In the context of this book, dharma is both the spiritual teachings that ultimately derive from the Buddhas and the spiritual path itself. Dharma may also mean "existence" and—usually when used in the plural—"phenomena."

dharmakaya (Tib: *bon sku, chos sku;* Skt: *dharmakaya*). A buddha is said to possess three bodies *(kayas)*: *dharmakaya, sambhogakaya,* and *nirmanakaya.* The *dharmakaya*, often translated as the "truth body," refers to the absolute nature of the buddha, which all buddhas share in common and which is identical with the absolute nature of all that exists: emptiness. The dharmakaya is non-dual, empty of conceptuality and free of all characteristics. (See also *sambhogakaya* and *nirmanakaya.*)

Dzogchen (Tib: *rdzogs chen*). Great perfection, great completion. Dzogchen is considered the highest teaching and practice in both Bön and the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism. Its fundamental tenet is that reality, including the individual, is already complete and perfect, that nothing needs to be transformed (as in tantra) or renounced (as in sutra), but only recognized for what it truly is. The essential Dzogchen practice is "self-liberation": allowing all that arises in experience to exist just as it is, without elaboration by the conceptual mind, without grasping or aversion.

gong-ter (Tib: *dgongs gter*). Mind treasure. In Tibetan culture there is a tradition of *terma*: sacred objects, texts, or teachings hidden by the masters of one age for the benefit of the future age in which the termas are found. The tantric masters who discover terma are known as *tertöns*, treasure find-

ers. Terma have been and may be found in physical locations such as caves or cemeteries or in elements such as water, wood, earth, or space. They may also be received in dreams and visionary experience, or found directly in deep levels of consciousness. The latter case is known as *gong-ter*, mind treasure.

guardian (Tib: *srung ma/ chos skyong*; Skt: *dharmapala*). Guardians are male or female beings pledged to protect the dharma (teachings) and the practitioners of the teachings. They may be worldly protectors or wrathful manifestations of enlightened beings. Tantric practitioners generally propitiate and rely upon guardians associated with their lineage.

jalus (Tib:*'ja' lus*). Rainbow body. The sign of full realization in Dzogchen is the attainment of the rainbow body. The realized Dzogchen practitioner, no longer deluded by apparent substantiality or dualisms such as mind and matter, releases the energy of the elements that compose the physical body at the time of death. The body itself is dissolved, leaving only hair and nails, and the practitioner consciously enters death.

karma (Tib: *las;* Skt: *karma*) *Karma* literally means "action," but more broadly refers to the law of cause and effect. Any action taken physically, verbally, or mentally, serves as a seed that will bear the fruit of its consequences in the future when the conditions are right for its realization. Positive actions have positive effects, such as happiness; negative actions have negative effects, such as unhappiness. Karma does not mean that life is determined, but that present conditions always arise from past actions.

karmic trace (Tib: *bag chags;* Skt: *vasana*). Every action—physical, verbal, or mental — undertaken by an individual, if performed with intention and even the slightest aversion or desire, leaves a trace in the mindstream of that individual. The accumulation of these karmic traces serves to condition every moment of experience of that individual, positively and negatively.

kaya (Tib: *sku*). The word has numerous meanings. In the context of this book it means "body" or "dimension of experience."

khandro (Tib: *mkha' 'gro ma*; Skt: *dakini*). The Tibetan equivalent of *dakini* is *khandroma*, which literally means "female-sky-traveler." "Sky" refers to emptiness; the dakini travels in that emptiness, that is, she acts in full realization of absolute reality. A dakini can be a human woman who has realized her true nature, or a non-human female or goddess, or a direct manifestation of enlightened mind.

kunzhi (Tib: *kun gzhi;* Skt: *alaya*). In Bön, the *kunzhi* is the basis of all that exists, including the individual. It is not synonymous with the *alaya vijnana* of Yogacara, which is more akin to the *kunzhi namshe* (see below). The kunzhi is the unity of emptiness and clarity; of the absolute open indeterminacy of ultimate reality and the unceasing display of appearance and awareness. The kunzhi is the base or ground of being.

kunzhi namshe (Tib: *kun gzhi rnam shes;* Skt: *alaya vijnana*). The *kunzhi namshe* is the basic consciousness of the individual. It is the "repository" or "storehouse" in which the karmic traces are stored, and from which future experience arises.

la (Tib: *bla*). Soul. Basic human goodness. Fundamental virtuous capacities of a species.

lama (Tib: *bla ma;* Skt: *guru*). *Guru* literally means "heavy," laden with enlightened qualities (*buddha guna*). *Lama* means "nothing higher." Lama refers to a spiritual teacher, who is of unsurpassed importance to the student practitioner. In the Tibetan tradition, the lama is considered to be more important even than the buddha, for it is the lama that brings the teachings to life for the student. On an ultimate level, the lama is one's own buddhanature. On the relative level, the lama is one's personal teacher. However, the term *lama* is commonly used as a polite form of address for any monk or spiritual teacher.

lhundrup (Tib: *lhun grub*). Spontaneous perfection or spontaneous presence. In Dzogchen, referring to the ceaseless, spontaneous manifestation of phenomena.

loka (Tib: *'jig rten;* Skt: *loka*) . Literally, "world" or "world system." Commonly used in English to refer to the six realms of cyclic existence, *loka* actually refers to the greater world systems, one of which is occupied by the six realms. (See "six realms of cyclic existence.")

lung (Tib: *rlung;* Skt: *vayu, prana*). *Lung* is the vital wind energy, commonly known in the West by its Sanskrit name, *prana*. Lung has a broad range of meanings; in the context of this book it refers to the vital energy upon which both the vitality of the body and consciousness depend.

marigpa (Tib: *ma rig pa;* Skt: *avidya*). Ignorance. The lack of knowledge of the truth, of the base, the *kunzhi*. Often two categories of marigpa are described: innate ignorance and cultural ignorance.

naga (Tib: *klu;* Skt: *naga*). Serpent spirits, associated with water.

ngön dro (Tib: *sngron 'gro;* Skt: *purvagama*). Preliminary. Usually refers to the preliminary practices of various kinds, depending on the level of teaching.

nirmanakaya (Tib: *sprul sku;* Skt: *nirmanakaya*). *Nirmanakaya* is the "emanation body" of the *dharmakaya*. Usually this refers to the visible, physical manifestation of a buddha. The term is also resonant with the dimension of physicality.

nirvana (Tib: *mya ngan las 'das pa;* Skt: *nirvana*). The transcendence of all suffering. The term is given different emphasis in the various schools of Bön and Buddhism. It is generally understood in contrast to *samsara*, conditioned existence subject to sorrow and pain.

pho wa (Tib: *'pho ba*). The transference of consciousness. Usually refers to the practice of consciously transferring the consciousness out of the body at death.

prana. See *lung*.

rigpa (Tib: *rig pa;* Skt: *vidya*). Literally, "awareness" or "knowing." In the Dzogchen teachings, *rigpa* refers to the innate, primordially pure, non-dual awareness, which is the true nature of the individual.

rinpoche (Tib: *rin po che*). Literally, "precious one." An honorific widely used in addressing an incarnate lama.

rushen (Tib: *ru shan*). Separation or distinction. In this book, refers to preliminary Dzogchen practices meant to divide, in experience, the nature of mind from the ordinary conceptual mind.

samadhi (Tib: *ting nge 'dzin*; Skt: *samadhi*). Any one of many various states of meditative awareness or trance.

samaya (Tib: *dam tshig;* Skt: *samaya*). Commitment or vow. Commonly, the commitment the practitioner makes in connection with tantric practice regarding behavior and actions. There are general vows and vows specific to particular tantric practices.

sambhogakaya (Tib: *longs sku;* Skt: *sambhogakaya*). The "enjoyment body" of the buddha. The *sambhogakaya* is a body made entirely of light. This form is often visualized in tantric and sutric practices. In Dzogchen, more often the image of the *dharmakaya* is visualized.

samsara (Tib: *'khor ba;* Skt: *samsara*). The realm of suffering that arises from the occluded, dualistic mind, where all entities are impermanent and

lack inherent existence, and where all sentient beings are subject to suffering. *Samsara* includes the six realms of cyclic existence, but more broadly refers to the characteristic mode of existence of sentient beings who suffer through being trapped in the delusions of ignorance and duality. Samsara ends when a being attains full liberation from ignorance.

sem (Tib: *sems*; Skt: *citta*). One of the many Tibetan terms for "mind." *Sem* is often translated as "conceptual mind," and refers to the moving mind rather than the nature of mind.

Shenla Odkar (Tib: *gShen lha 'Od dkar*). Shenla Odkar is the *sambhogakaya* form of Shenrab Miwoche, the buddha who founded Bön.

Shenrab Miwoche (Tib: *gShen rab Mi bo che*). Shenrab Miwoche was the *nirmanakaya* Buddha that founded Bön, and is traditionally believed to have lived seventeen thousand years ago. There are fifteen volumes of the biography of Shenrab Miwoche in the Bön literature.

shunyata (Tib: *stong pa nyid;* Skt: *shunyata*). Emptiness. The absolute nature of all phenomena.

six realms of cyclic existence (Tib: *rigs drug*). Commonly referred to as "the six realms" or "six *lokas*." "The six realms" refers to six classes of beings: gods, demi-gods, humans, animals, hungry-ghosts, and hell-beings. Beings in the six realms are subject to suffering. They are literal realms, in which beings take birth, and also broad experiential and affective bands of potential experience that shape and limit experience in our current life.

sok (Tib: *srog*). The life-force, vitality. Closely related to the innate awareness, *rigpa*.

sutra (Tib: *mdo;* Skt: *sutra*.) The sutras are texts composed of teachings that came directly from the historical Buddha. The teachings of the sutras are based on the path of renunciation and form the base of monastic life.

tantra (Tib: *rgyud;* Skt: *tantra*). Tantras are teachings of the Buddhas, as are sutras. Many tantras were rediscovered by yogis of the *terma* tradition (see discussion of *terma* under *gong-ter*). Tantras are based on the path of transformation and include practices such as working with the energy of the body, the transference of consciousness, dream and sleep yogas, and so on. Certain classes of tantras, of the non-gradual transformation path, may also contain teachings on Dzogchen.

Tapihritsa (Tib: *Ta pi hri tsa*). Although considered an historical person, Tapihritsa is iconographically represented as a *dharmakaya* Buddha, naked

and without ornaments, personifying absolute reality. He is one of the two principal masters in the Dzogchen lineage of the *Zhang Zhung Nyan Gyud*.

three root poisons (Tib: *rtsa ba'i nyon mongs gsum;* Skt: *mulaklesha*). Ignorance, aversion and desire, the three fundamental afflictions that perpetuate the continuity of life in the realms of suffering.

tigle (Tib: *thig le;* Skt: *bindu*). *Tigle* has multiple meanings depending on context. Although usually translated as "drop" or "seminal point," in the context of the dream and sleep yogas *tigle* refers to a luminous sphere of light representing a quality of consciousness and used as a focus in meditation practice.

tigle nyag chik (Tib: *thig le nyag cig*). The single sphere, a symbol of existence without edges or divisions. The non-dual nature of all reality.

togäl. See *Crossing Over*.

trekchöd. See *Cutting Through*.

trul khor (Tib: *'khrul 'khor;* Skt: *yantra*). Literally, "magical wheel." Special yogic practices. A practice of physical posture, movement, breathing, and meditation meant to redirect the prana into the central channel. The yoga clears obstacles in the body, energy, and mind and promotes health. Its ultimate purpose is to use the body and the energies of the body as a support for the stabilization of the practitioner in the non-dual awareness of *rigpa*.

tsa. See *channels.*

tsa lung (Tib: *rtsa rlung*).Yogic practices that utilize the channels (*tsa*) and vital energies (*lung*). This is a broad category and includes many practices in all Tibetan tantric traditions.

tse (Tib: *tshe*). Life-span; the potential length of our life.

tummo (Tib: *gtum mo;* Skt: *candali*). The yoga of the inner fire. A yoga that uses physical postures, breathing, and visualizations to activate the inner fire, the fire prana, in the navel chakra and bring it up the central channel to the crown chakra. The practice is famous in all sects of Bön and Tibetan Buddhism. It is the central yoga in the *Six Yogas of Naropa* and in other systems. In Bön, it is often combined with the *trul khor* (see above).

yee (Tib: *yid;* Skt: *manas*). The functional mind as opposed to the nature of mind. One of many Tibetan terms referring to various aspects of mind.

yidam (Tib: *yi dam;* Skt: *[ishta]-devata*). The *yidam* is a tutelary or

meditational deity embodying an aspect of enlightened mind. There are four categories of yidam: peaceful, increasing, powerful, and wrathful. Yidams manifest in these different forms to overcome specific negative forces.

yi ge (Tib: *yi ge*). Written language, word, syllable, character.

yogin (Tib: *rnal 'byor pa;* Skt: *yogin*) A male practitioner of meditative yogas such as the dream and sleep yogas.

yogini (Tib: *rnal 'byor ma;* Skt: *yogini*). A female practitioner of meditative yoga.

Zhang Zhung Nyan Gyud (Tib: *Zhang zhung snyan rgyud*). The Zhang Zhung Nyan Gyud is one of the most important cycles of Dzogchen teachings in Bön. It belongs to the *upadesha* series of teachings.

zhine (Tib: *zhi gnas;* Skt: *shamatha*). Calm abiding, tranquility. The practice of calm abiding uses focus on an external or internal object to develop concentration and mental stability. Calm abiding is a fundamental practice, the basis for the development of all other higher meditation practices, and necessary for both the dream and sleep yogas.

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Other books by Tenzin Wangyal:

The Tibetan Yogas of Dream and Sleep. Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 1998.

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The Twelve Astrological Signs and Their Directions

This is a list of the astrological signs used in determining the direction that offerings are made, as described in the text. The signs are correlated with the year of birth, following a twelve-year cycle. The years are based on a lunar calendar.

Each sign is related to a direction. In the Tibetan system, the cardinal directions are divided into "upper" and "lower" directions. The tiger, for example, is associated with the east, but closer to the northeast, while the hare is east but closer to the southeast. This allows for twelve directions.

The sign opposite the birth sign is considered the most likely direction from which negative forces will approach. Thus the offering is thrown or placed in the direction of the opposite sign. To determine which sign to use, count your sign as one, then continue the count to seven. That is your opposite sign.

For example, anyone born in the year of the dragon would place the offering to the northwest, the direction of the dog, which is the opposite of the dragon.

In the Chinese tradition, the Bön year of the garuda is known as the year of the rooster, and the year of the elephant is known as the year of the ox.

tiger	east (closer to northeast)
hare	east (closer to southeast)
dragon	southeast
snake	south (closer to southeast)
horse	south (closer to southwest)
sheep	southwest
monkey	west (closer to southwest)
garuda (rooster)	west (closer to northwest)
dog	northwest
pig	north (closer to northwest)
rat	north (closer to northeast)
elephant (ox)	northeast

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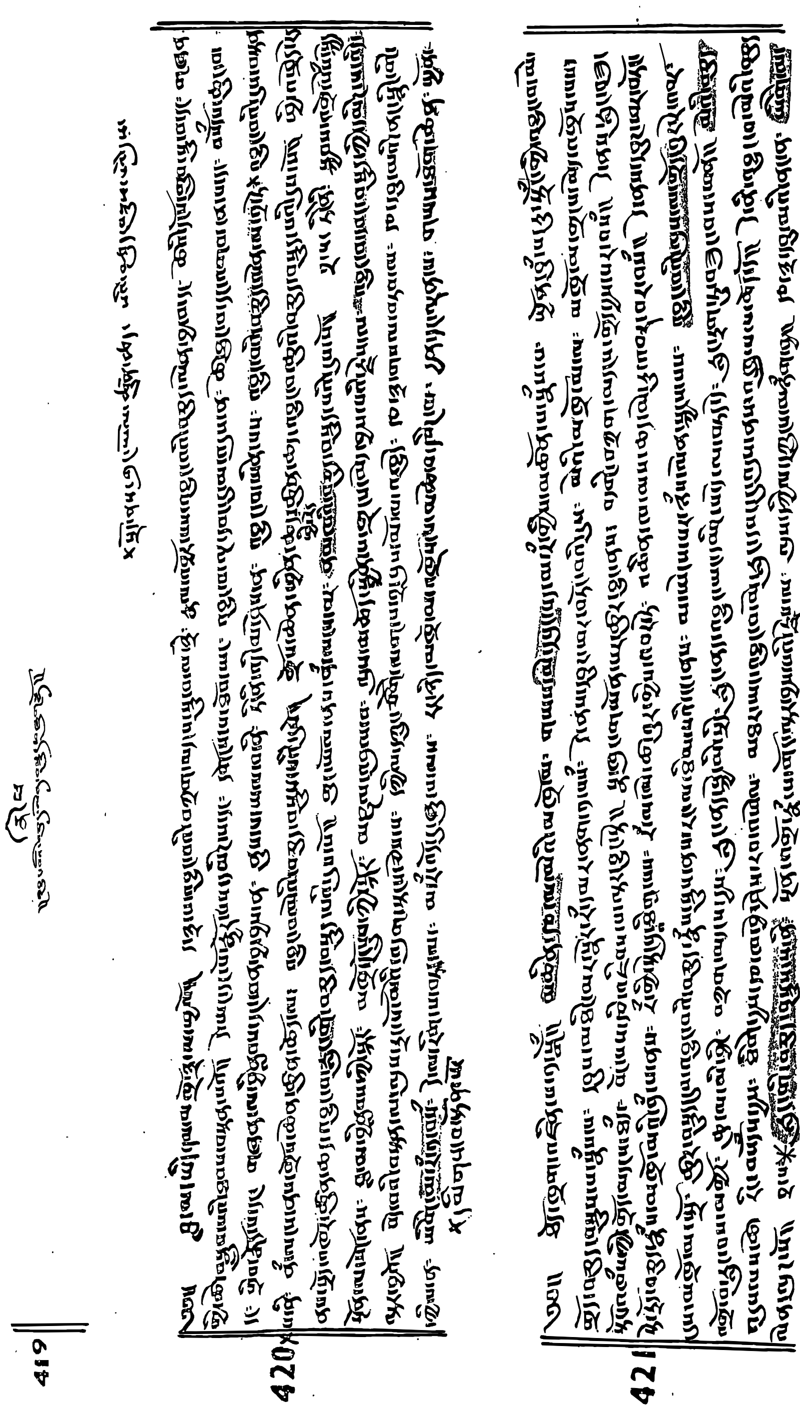
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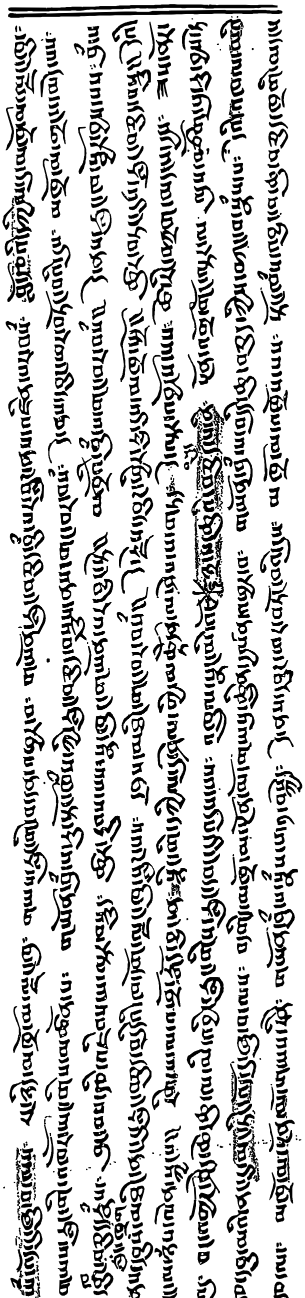
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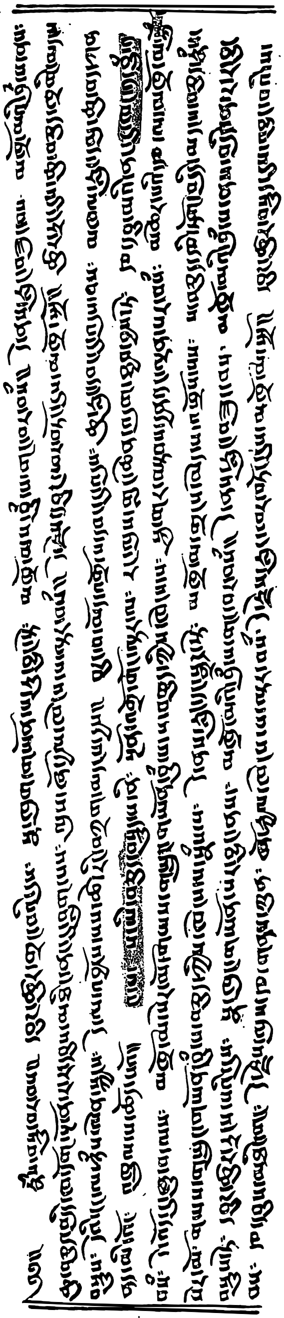
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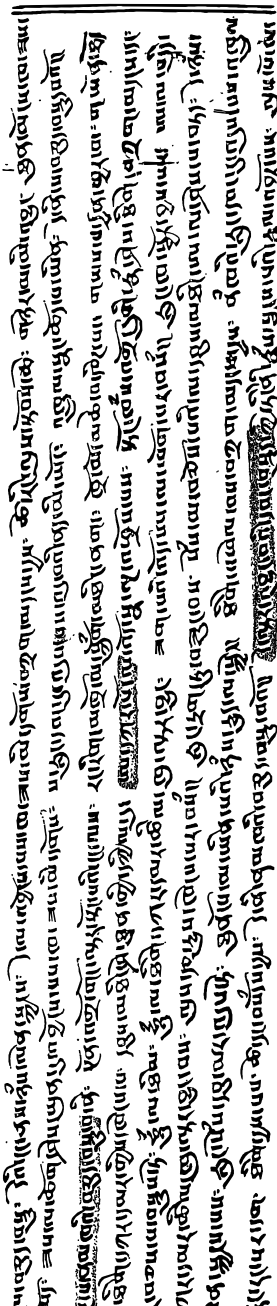




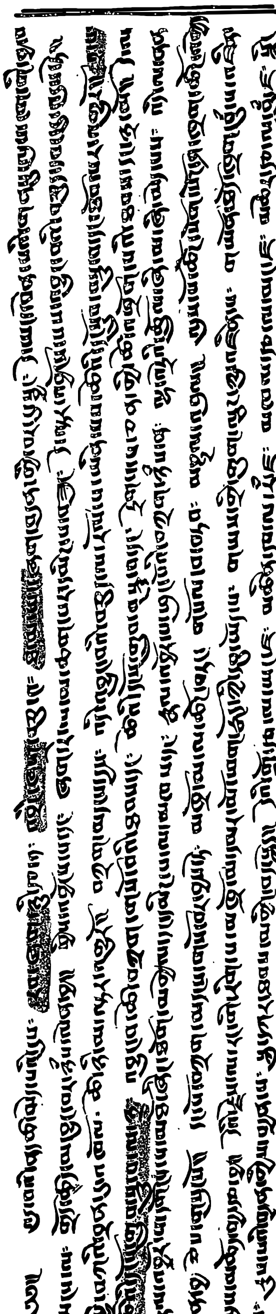
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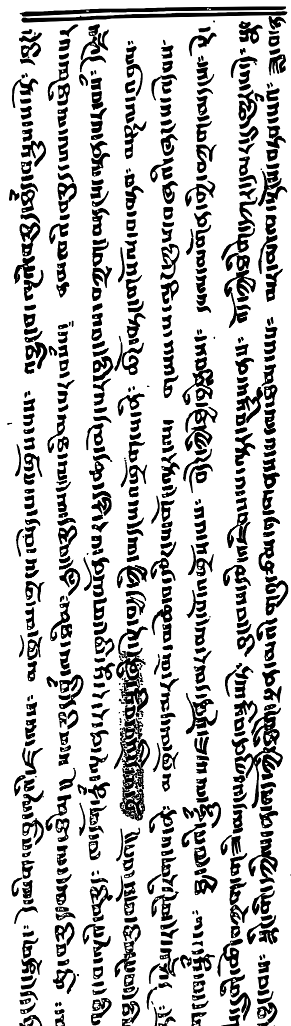
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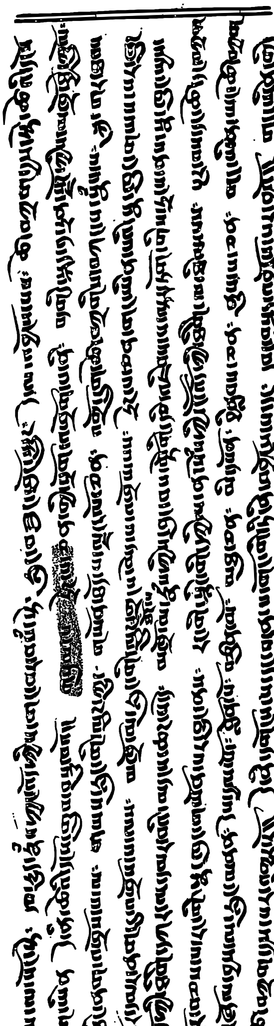
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